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WILLIAM P. McGIVERN'S NEW NOVEL

ARGOSY

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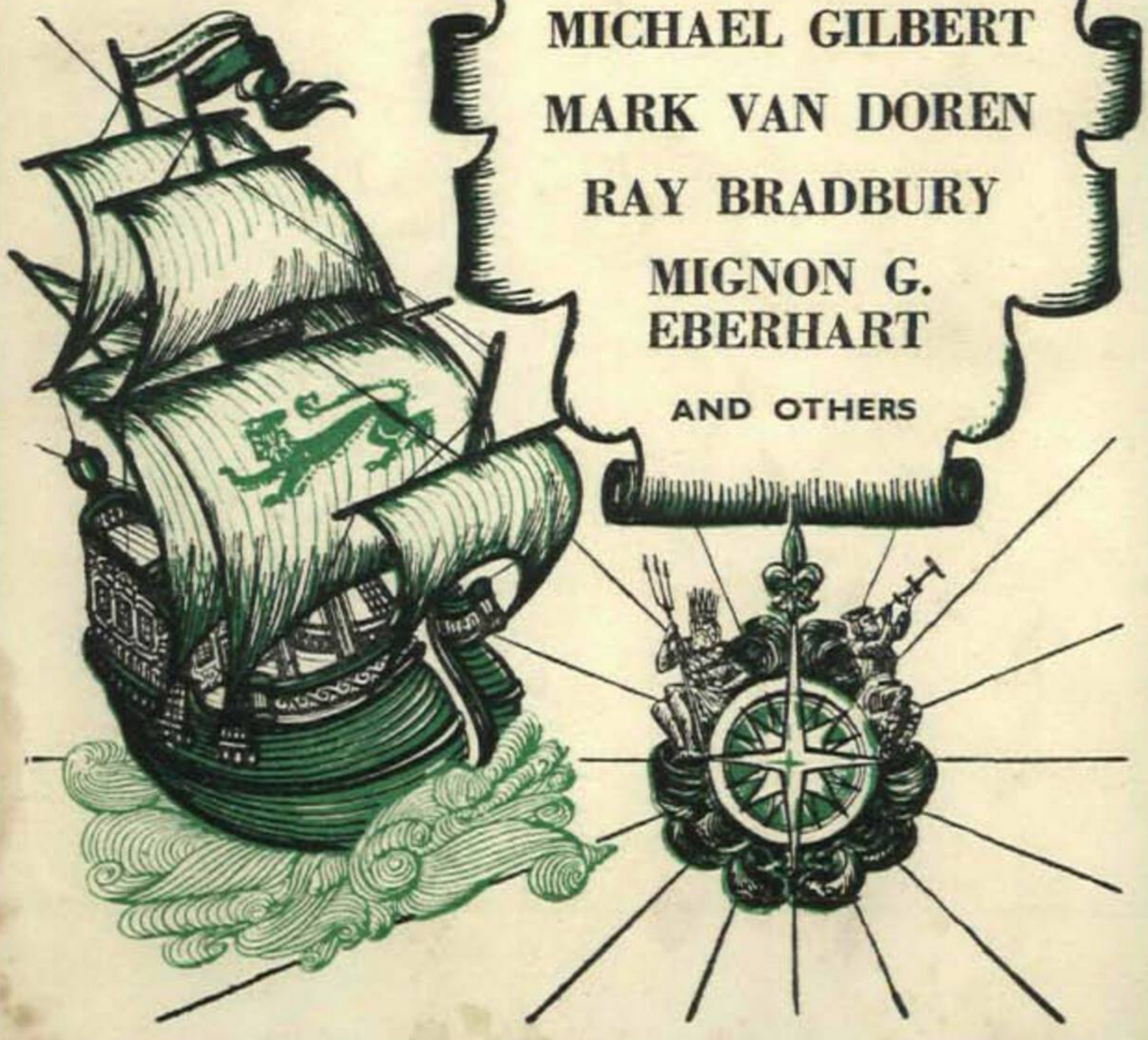

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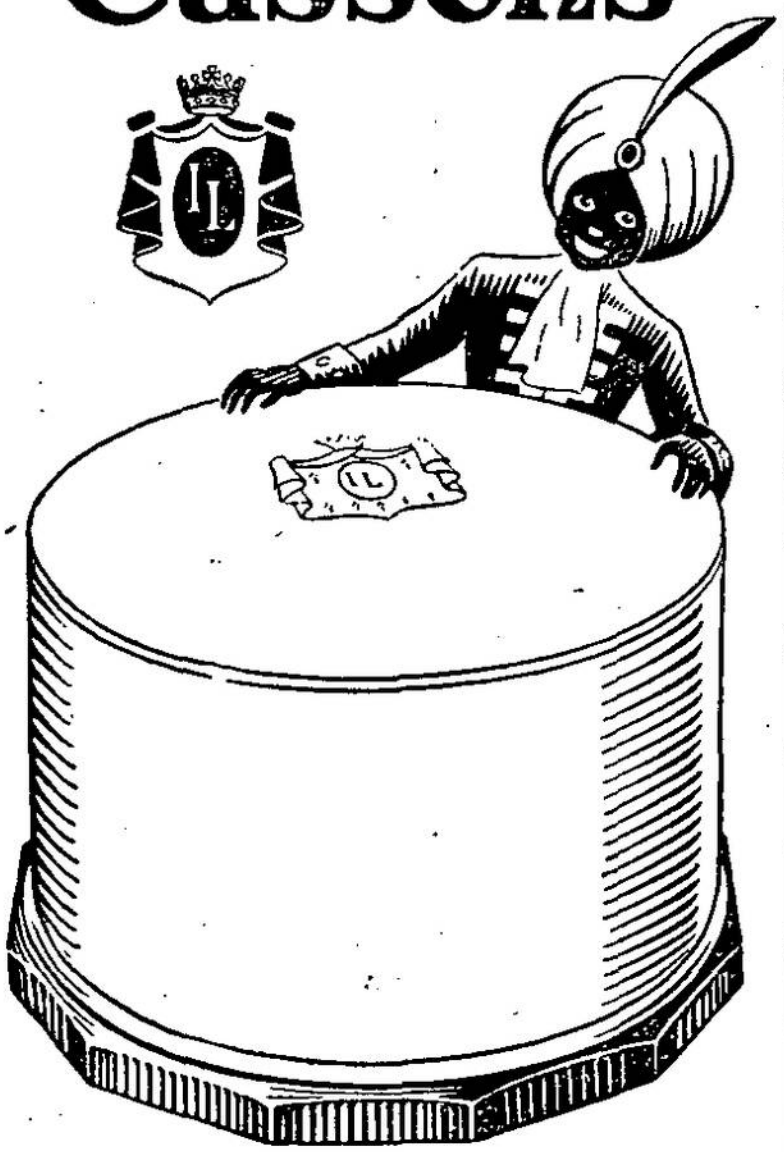

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ARGOSY

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Summertime

SPOTTED leopards stroll the avenue;
The caterpillars come and they are green,
Yukon yellow, chocolate, basement blue.

A Sunday painter would enjoy the view,
The morning-glories heavy on the strings,
The quiet converse of the avenue.

Stealthy jungle shadows come and go;
Roosters flail the dust, and meadows run
Beyond the reach of light serene and slow.

Like cargoes riverboats might jettison,
White clouds collect upon the country air
Or drop below the rooftops one by one.

The sun, old spot, sits gaudy in the wings,
And cocks his head, and combs his flaming hair:
Spotted leopards stroll the avenue.

WILLIAM JAY SMITH

WATERCRESS GIRL

Afternoon, cuckoo-drowsy, full of sun, thickened like a web about him

by H. E. BATES

THE first time he ever went to that house was in the summer, when he was seven, and his grandfather drove him down the valley in a yellow trap and all the beans were in flower, with skylarks singing so high above them in the brilliant light that they hung trembling there like far-off butterflies.

"Who is it we're going to see?" he said.

"Sar' Ann."

"Which one is Sar' Ann?"

"Now mek out you don' know which one Sar' Ann is," his grandfather said, and then tickled the flank of the pony with the end of the plaited whip—he always wanted to plait reeds like that himself but he could never make them tight enough—so that the brown rumps, shorn and groomed for summer, quivered like firm round jellies.

"I don't think I've ever seen her," he said.

"You seen her at Uncle Arth's," his grandfather said. "Mek out you don't remember that, and you see her a time or two at Jenny's." He pronounced it Jinny, but even then the boy could not remember who Jinny was and he knew his grandfather would not tell him until he remembered who Sar' Ann was and perhaps not even after that.

He tried for some moments longer to recall what Sar' Ann was like and remembered presently a square old lady in a pork-pie lace cap and a sort of bit of black jet beads on a large frontal expanse of shining satin. Her eyes were watering. She sat on the threshold of a house that smelled of apples and wax polish. She was in the sun, with a lace-pillow and bone bobbins in a blue and ivory fan on her knees. She was making lace and her hands were covered with big raised veins like the leaves of cabbages when you turned them upside down. He was sure that this was Sar' Ann. He remembered how she had touched his hands with her big cold cabbagy ones and said she would fetch him a cheese-cake, or if he would rather have it a piece of toffee, from the cupboard in her kitchen.

She said the toffee was rather sugary and that made him say

he preferred the cheese-cake, but his grandfather said: "Now don't you git up. He's ettin' from morn to night now. His eyes are bigger'n his belly. You jis' sit still," and he felt he would cry because he was so fond of cheese-cake and because he could not bear his disappointment.

"She's the one who wanted to give me cheese-cake," he said, "isn't she?"

"No, she ain't," his grandfather said. "That's your Aunt Turvey."

"Then is she the one who's married to Uncle Arth? Up the high steps?" he said.

"Uncle Arth ain't married," his grandfather said. "That's jis' the widder-woman who looks after him."

His Uncle Arth was always in a night-shirt, with a black scarf round his head. He lived in bed all the time. His eyes were very red. Inside him, so his grandfather said, was a stone and the stone couldn't go up or down but was fixed, his grandfather said, in his kitney, and it was growing all the time.

The stone was an awful nightmare to him, the boy. How big was it? What sort of stone was it, he would say, a stone in the kitney?

"Like a pibble," his grandfather said. "Hard as a pibble. And very like as big as a thresh's egg. Very like bigger'n that by now. Very like as big as a magpie's."

"How did it get there?"

"You're arstin' on me now," his grandfather said. "It'd be a puzzle to know. But it got there. And there it is. Stuck in his kitney."

"Has anybody ever seen it?"

"Nobody."

"Then if nobody's ever seen it how do they know it's there?"

"Lean forward," his grandfather said. "We're gittin' to Long Leys hill. Lean forward, else the shafts'll poke through the sky."

It was when they climbed slowly up the long wide hill, already white with the dust of early summer, that he became aware of the beans in flower and the skylarks singing so loftily above them. The scent of beans came in soft waves of wonderful sweetness. He saw the flowers on the grey sunlit stalks like swarms of white, dark-throated bees. The hawthorn flower was nearly over now and was turning pink wherever it remained. The singing of the skylarks lifted the sky upward, farther and farther, loftier and loftier, and the sun made the blue of it clear and blinding.

He felt that all summer was pouring down the hill, between ditches of rising meadowsweet, to meet him. The cold quivering days of coltsfoot flower, the icy-sunny days of racing cloud-

shadow over drying ploughland, the dark-white days of April hail were all behind him, and he was thirsty with summer dust and his face was hot in the sun.

" You ain't recollected her yit, have you? " his grandfather said.

They were at the top of the hill now and below them, in its yellow meadows, he could see the river winding away in broad and shining curves. He knew that that river was at the end of the earth; that the meadows, and with them the big woods of oak and hornbeam and their fading dusty spangles of flower, were another world.

" Take holt o' the reins a minute," his grandfather said. He put on the brake a notch or two and the brake shoes scraped on the metal tires. The boy held the thin smooth reins lightly between his fingers, the way he had been taught to do. He sat forward on the high horsehair cushions and looked down the long black tram-lines of the dead level reins to the brown pony's ears and felt himself, for one moment, high on the hill, to be floating in air, level with all the skylarks above the fields below.

" I'll jis' git me bacca going," his grandfather said. " We'll be there in about a quartern of hour. You keep holt on her steady."

He wanted to say to his grandfather that that was a funny word, quartern; his school-teacher never used that word; and then as he turned he saw the brown, red-veined face softened by the first pulls of tobacco. All the mystery of it was dissolved in a blue sweet cloud.

Then his grandfather began coughing because the bacca, he said, had gone down wrong way and was tiddling his gills. His eyes were wet from the coughing and he was laughing and saying: " You know who she is. She's the one with the specs like glarneys."

Then he knew. She was a little woman, he remembered clearly now, with enormous spyglass spectacles. They were thick and round like the marbles he played with. She was always whisking about like a clean starched napkin. He had seen her at Uncle Arth's, and she had jolted Uncle Arth about the bed with a terrible lack of mercy as she remade his pillows, smacking them with her lightning hands as if they were disobedient bottoms.

The colossal spectacles gave the eyes a terrible look of magnification. They wobbled sometimes like masses of pale floating frog-spawn. He did not like her; he was held in the spawnlike hypnotism of the eyes and dared not speak. She had a voice like a jackdaw's which pecked and mocked at everybody with nasty jabs.

He knew that he had got her mixed up somehow and he said: "I thought the one with the glass eye was Aunt Prunes."

"Prudence!" his grandfather said. "They're sisters. She's the young 'un, Prudence." He spat in a long liquid line, with offhand care, over the side of the trap. "Prunes?—That was funny. How'd you come to git holt o' that?"

"I thought everybody else called her Prunes."

"Oh! You did, simly? Well, it's Prudence. Prudence—that's her proper name."

Simly was another funny word. He would never understand that word. That was another word his school-teacher never used.

"Is she the one with the moustache?"

"God alive," the man said. "Don't you say moustache. You'll git me hung if you say moustache. That's your Aunt Prudence you're talking about. Females don't have moustaches—you know that."

He knew better than that because Aunt Prunes had one. She was a female and it was quite a long moustache and she had, what was more, some whiskers on the central part of her chin.

"Why doesn't she shave it off?" he said.

"You watch what you're doing," his grandfather said. "You'll have us in the duck-pond."

"How do you spell it?" he said. "Her name—Prunes?"

"Here, you gimme holt o' the reins now," his grandfather said. "We'll be there in five ticks of a donkey's tail."

His grandfather took the reins and let the brake off, and in a minute the pony was trotting and they were in a world of high green reeds and grey drooping willows by the river.

"Is it the house near the spinney?" he said.

"That's it," his grandfather said. "The little 'un with the big chimney."

He was glad he remembered the house correctly: not because he had ever seen it but because his grandfather always described it with natural familiarity, as if taking it for granted that he had seen it. He was glad too about Aunt Prunes. It was very hard to get everyone right. There were so many of them, Aunt Prunes and Sar' Ann and Aunt Turvey and Uncle Arth and Jenny and Uncle Ben Newton, who kept a pub, and Uncle Olly, who was a fat man with short black leggings like polished bottles.

His grandfather would speak of these people as if they were playmates who had always been in his life and were to be taken for granted naturally and substantially like himself. They were all very old, terribly old, and he never knew, even afterwards, if they were ordinary aunts or uncles or great ones or only cousins some stage removed.

The little house had two rooms downstairs with polished red bricks for floors and white glass vases of dried reeds from the river on the mantelpieces. His grandfather and Aunt Prunes and Sar' Ann and himself had dinner in the room where the stove was, and there were big dishes of potatoes, mashed with butter sauce. Before dinner he sat in the other room with his grandfather and Aunt Prunes and looked at a large leather book called *Sunday At Home*, a prize Aunt Prunes had won at Bible Class, a book in which there were sandwiched, between steel-cuts of men in frock-coats and sailors in sailing-ships and ladies in black bonnets, pressings of dried flowers from the meadows and the river.

His contemplation of the flat golden transparencies of buttercup and the starry eyes of bull-daisy and the woolly feathers of grass and reed was ravaged continually by the voice of Sar' Ann, the jackdaw, pecking and jabbing from the kitchen: "There's something there to keep you quiet. That's a nice book, that is. You can look at that all afternoon."

"You tell me," Aunt said softly, "when you want another."

He liked Aunt Prunes. She was quiet and tender. The moustache, far from being forbidding, brushed him with friendly softness, and the little room was so hot with sun and cooking that there were beads of sweat on the whiskers that he made the mistake of thinking, for some time, were drops of the cowslip wine that she was drinking. His grandfather had several glasses of cowslip wine and at the third or fourth of them he took off his coat and collar.

At the same time Aunt Prunes bent down and took the book away from him and said: "You can take off your coat too. That's it. That's better. Do you want to go anywhere?"

"Not yet."

"When you do, it's down the garden and behind the elderberry tree."

Her eyes were a modest brown colour, the same colour as her moustache, and there were many wrinkles about them as she smiled. He could smell the sweetish breath, like the yeast his grandfather used for baking, of the fresh wine on her lips, and she said: "What would you like to do this afternoon? Tell me what you'd like to do."

"Read this book."

"I mean really."

"I don't know."

"You do what you like," she said. "You go down to the back brook or in the garden or into the spinney and find snails or sticklebacks or whatever you like."

She smiled delicately, creating thousands of wrinkles, and then from the kitchen Sar' Ann screeched: " I'm dishing up in two minutes, you boozers. You'd guzzle there till bulls'-noon if I'd let you."

Bulls'-noon was another word, another strange queer thing he did not understand.

For dinner they had Yorkshire pudding straight out of the pan and on to the plate, all by itself, as the opening course. Sometimes his grandfather slid slices of the creamy yellow pudding into his mouth on the end of his knife and said he remembered the days when all pudding was eaten first and you had your plate turned upside down, so that you could turn it over when the meat came.

Sar' Ann said she remembered that too and she said they were the days and she didn't care what anybody said. People were happier. They didn't have so much of everything but they were happier. He saw Aunt Prunes give a little dry grin whenever her voice went jabbing on and once he thought he saw her wink at his grandfather.

All the time the door of the little room was open so that he could see into the garden with its white pinks and stocks and purple iris flags and now and then he could hear the cuckoo, sometimes near, sometimes far off across the meadows, and many blackbirds singing in endless call and answer in the oak trees at the end of the garden, where rhubarb and elder-berry were in foaming flower together.

" You can hear nightingales too," Aunt Prunes said. " Would you like more pudding? You can have more pudding if you want it."

But his grandfather said again that his eyes were always bigger than his belly and the pudding was put away. " Ets like a thacker," his grandfather said, and Aunt Prunes said, " Let him eat then. I like to see boys eat. It does your heart good," and she smiled and gave him cloudy piles of white potatoes and white sauce from a blue china boat and thin slices of rich beef with blood running out washing against the shores of his potatoes like the little waves of a delicate pink sea.

" How's Nance and Granny Houghton? " Sar' Ann said, and his grandfather said fair to mid and suddenly there was great talk of relatives, of grown-ups, of people he did not know, of Charley and a man he thought was named Uncle Fuggles and Cathy and Aunt Em and Maude Rose and two people called Liz and Herbert from Bank Top. His grandfather who had begun the meal with three or four glasses of cowslip wine and a glass of beer, now helped himself to another glass of beer and then dropped

gravy down his waistcoat. Aunt Prunes had beer too and her eyes began to look warm and sleepy and beautifully content.

Afternoon, cuckoo-drowsy, still and full of sun, seemed to thicken like a web about him long before the meal was over. He thought with dread of its quietness when all of them would be asleep and he himself in the little room with a big boring book and its rustling transparencies of faded flowers. He knew what it was to try to move in the world of grown-up sleep. The whisper of the thinnest page would wake them. Night was the time for sleeping and it was one of the mysteries of life that people could also sleep by day, in chairs, in summer-time, in mouth-open attitudes, and with snorting noises and legs suddenly jumping like the legs of horses when the flies were bad.

Then to his joy Aunt Prunes remembered and said: "You know what I said. You run into the garden and have a look in the spinney for nests. Go down as far as the back brook if you like."

"That's it," his grandfather said. "You'll very like see a moorhen's or a coot's or summat down there. Else a pike or summat. Used to be a rare place for pike, a-layin' there a-top o' the water—"

"Don't you git falling in," Sar' Ann said. "Don't you git them feet wet. Don't you git them gooseberries—they'll give you belly-ache summat chronic—"

"You bring me some flowers," Aunt Prunes said. "Eh?—How's that? You stay a long time, as long as you like, and bring me some flowers."

There were no nests in the spinney except a pigeon's high up in a hazel tree that was too thin to climb. He was not quite sure about the song of a nightingale. He knew the blackbird's, full and rich and dark like themselves and deep like the summer shadow of the closing wood, and with the thrushes they filled all the wood with bell-sounds and belling echoes.

Beyond the wood the day was clear and hot. The grass was high to his knees and the ground falling away, was marshy in places, with mounds of sedge, as it ran down towards the back brook and the river. He walked with his eyes on the ground, partly because of oozy holes among the sedge, partly because he hoped to see the brown ring of a moorhen's nest in the marshier places.

It was because of his way of walking that he did not see, for some time, the girl standing up to her knees in red-ochre mud, among half-floating beds of dark green cresses. But suddenly he lifted his head and saw her standing there, bare-legged and

bare-armed, staring at him as if she had been watching him for a long time. Her brown osier cress-basket was like a two-bushel measure and was slung over her shoulder with a strap.

"You don't live here," she said.

"No," he said. "Do you?"

"Over there," she said. "In that house."

"Which house?" He could not see a house.

"You come here and you can see it," she said.

When he had picked his way through tufts of sedge to where she was standing in the bed of cresses he still could not see a house, either about the wood or across the meadows on the rising ground beyond.

"You can see the chimney smoking," she said.

"It's not a house. It's a hut," he said.

"That's where we live."

"All the time?"

"Yes," she said. "You're sinking in."

The toes of his boots were slowly drowning in red-ochre water.

"If you're coming out here you'd better take your shoes and stockings off," she said.

A moment or two later his bare feet were cool in the water. She was gathering cresses quickly, cutting them off with an old shoe-knife, leaving young sprigs and trailing skeins of white root behind. She was older than himself, nine or ten, he thought, and her hair hung ribbonless and uncombed, a brown colour, rather like the colour of the basket, down her back.

"Can I gather?" he said, and she said, yes, if he knew what brooklime was.

"I know brooklime," he said. "Everybody knows brooklime."

"Then which is it? Show me which it is. Which is brooklime?"

That was almost as bad, he thought, as being nagged by Sar' Ann. The idea that he did not know brooklime from cress seemed to him a terrible insult and a pain. He snatched up a piece in irritation but it did not break and came up instead from the mud-depths in a long rope of dripping red-black slime, spattering his shirt and trousers.

She laughed at this and he laughed too. Her voice, he thought, sounded cracked, as if she were hoarse from shouting or a cold. The sound of it carried a long way. He heard it crack over the meadows and the river with a coarse broken sort of screech that was like the slitting of rag in the deep oppressive afternoon.

He never knew till long afterwards how much he liked that

sound. She repeated it several times during the afternoon. In the same cracked voice she laughed at questions he asked or things he did not know. In places the water, shallower, was warm on his feet, and the cresses were a dark polished green in the sun. She laughed because he did not know that anyone could live by gathering cresses. He must be a real town boy, she said. There was only she and her father, she told him, and she began to tell what he afterwards knew were beautiful lies about the way they got up every other day at two in the morning and tramped out to sell cresses in Evensford and Bedford and towns about the valley.

" But the shops are not open then," he said and that made her laugh again, cracked and thin, with that long slitting echo across the drowsy meadows.

" It's not in the shops we sell them," she said. " It's in the streets—don't you know that?—in the streets—"

And suddenly she lifted her head and hung back her throat and yelled the cry she used in the streets. He had heard that cry before, high and long and melancholy, like a call across lonely winter marshes in its slow fall and dying away, and there was to be a time in his life when it died for ever and he never heard it again.

" Watercree-ee-ee-ee-ee-s! Fresh cree-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-s! Lovely fresh watercree-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-s! "

Standing up to his knees in water, his hands full of wet cresses and slimy skeins of roots dripping red mud down his shirt and trousers, he listened to that fascinating sound travelling like a bird-cry, watery and not quite earthly, down through the spinney and the meadows of buttercup and the places where the pike were supposed to lie.

His eyes must have been enormous and transfixed in his head as he listened, because suddenly she broke the note of the cry and laughed at him again and then said: " You do it. You see if you can do it—"

What came out of his mouth was like a little soprano trill compared with her own full-throated, long-carrying cry. It made her laugh again and she said: " You ought to come with us. Come with us tomorrow—how long are you staying here? "

" Only today."

" I don't know where we'll go tomorrow," she said. " Evensford, I think. Sometimes we go forty or fifty miles—miles and miles. We go to Buckingham market sometimes—that's forty miles—"

" Evensford," he said. "That's where I come from. I could see you there if you go."

"All right," she said. "Where will you be? We come in by The Waggon and Horses—down the hill, that way."

"I'll be at The Waggon and Horses waiting for you," he said. "What time?"

"You be there at five o'clock," she said. "Then I'll learn you how to do it, like this—watercree-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-s! Fresh cree-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-s! Lovely fresh watercree-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee-s!"

As the sound died away it suddenly seemed to him that he had been there, up to his knees in water, a very long time, perhaps throughout the entire length of the sultry, sun-flushed afternoon. He did not know what time it was. He was cut off from the world of Aunt Prunes and Sar' Ann and his grandfather, the little house and the white pinks and the gooseberry trees, the big boring book whose dead flowers turned in whispers.

He knew that he ought to go back and said: "I got to go now. I'll see you tomorrow though—I'll be there. Five o'clock."

"Yes, you be there," she said. She wiped a mayfly from her face with her forearm, drawing water and mud across it, and then remembered something. "You want some cresses for tea? You can take some."

She plunged her hands into the basket and brought them out filled with cresses and gave them to him. They were cool and wet and he thought, not only then but long afterwards, that they were the nicest things perhaps anyone had ever given him.

"So long," she said.

"So long." That was another funny expression, he thought. He could never understand people who said so long when they seemed to mean, as he did, soon.

She waved her hands, spilling arcs of water-drops in the sun, as he climbed the stile into the spinney and went back. He did his best to wave in answer, but his shoes and stockings were too wet to wear and his hands were full with them and the cresses.

Instead he simply stood balanced for a moment on the top bar of the stile, so that she could see him well and then call to him for the last time: "Cree-ee-ee-ee-ee-es! Lovely fresh cree-ee-ee-ee-ee-es!"

It was only Aunt Prunes who was not angry with him. His grandfather called him "a young gallows," and kept saying, "Where the Hanover've you bin all the time? God A'mighty, you'll git me hung. I'll be burned if I don't git hung," and Sar' Ann flew about the kitchen with the squawks of a trapped hen, telling him: "You know what happens to little boys what git wet-foot? And look at your shirt! They git their death, they

catch their death. And don't you know who them folks are? Gyppos—that's all they are. Gyppos—they steal things, they live on other folks. That's the sort of folks they are. Don't you go near such folks again—they'll very like keep you and take you away and you'll never see nobody who knows you again. Then we'll find you in the bury-hole."

But he was not afraid of that and Aunt Prunes only said: "You didn't bring me my flowers, did you? I like watercress though. I'm glad you brought the watercress. I can have it with my tea."

It was late before they could start for home again. That was because his socks and shirt took a long time to dry and his shirt had to have an iron run over it several times in case, Sar' Ann kept saying, his mother had a fit.

Before getting up into the trap he had to kiss both Sar' Ann and Aunt Prunes, and for some moments he was lost in the horror of the big globular spectacles reflecting and magnifying the evening sun, and then in the friendliness of the dark moustaches below which the warm mouth smiled and said: "How would you like to stay with me one day? Just you and me in the summer. Would you?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then you come and see me again, won't you, soon?"

He said yes, he would see her soon. But in fact he did not see her soon or later or at any time again. He did not go to that house again until he was grown up. That was the day they were burying her and when the cork of silence that hung over the grave had blown out again he felt he could hear nothing but the gassy voice of Sar' Ann, old by then but with the same fierce roving globular eyes, shrilly reminding him of the day he had gathered cresses.

"I'll bet you would never known her now," she said, "that girl, would you? Would you ever know that this was her?"

Then she was by his side and he was talking to her: the girl who had gathered the cresses, the same girl who had called with that screeching, melancholy, marshy cry across the summer afternoon. She was not fat but she had a great placidity. She was all in black and her hat had a purple feather in the crown.

He remembered the little hut and the brown osier basket on her lithe thin shoulders and he asked her where she lived and what she was doing now.

"In the new houses," she said. "I'm Mrs. Corbett now."

She took him to the garden hedge and pointed out to him blocks of bricks, like the toys of gigantic children, red and raw and concrete-fenced, lining the road above the valley. That

was the road where he and his grandfather had driven down on that distant summer morning, when the beans were in flower and he had got so mixed with his relatives and had wondered how Aunt Prunes had spelt her name.

"That's us," she said. She pointed with stout and podgy finger, a trifle nervously but with pride, across the fields. "The second one. The one with the television. Have you got television?"

"No."

"You ought to have it," she said. "It's wonderful to see things so far away. Don't you think it's wonderful?"

"Wonderful," he said.

But as he drove home that night, as a boy, watching the sky of high summer turn from blue to palest violet and then more richly to purple-bronze and the final green-gold smokiness of twilight, he did not know these things. He sat still on the cushions of the trap, staring ahead. The evening was full of the scent of bean flowers and he was searching for early stars.

"Shall we light the lamps?" he said.

And presently they lit the lamps. They too were golden. They seemed to burn with wonderful brightness, lighting the grasses of the roadside and the flowers of the ditches and the crowns of fading may. And though he did not know it then, they too were fading, for all their brightness. They too were dying, along with the things he had done and seen and loved, the little house, the cuckoo day, the tender female moustaches and the voice of the watercress girl.

★ ★ ★

MERRY PEASANT

They, [the Irish], like most people of peasant stock, are hard realists, and the combination takes a lot of understanding.

Despite Lady Kenmare's love of the people and their perfectly genuine affection for her, she could be taken in, while Lord Kenmare never was. Going along the street with him one morning, we met a cattle drover. He had had a drop or two on the way and felt talkative. Lord Kenmare asked him whether he had been to see Mr. X and whether he had sold him anything. "Yes, he bought a fine heifer." "And," said Lord Kenmare, "I suppose you did him in the eye?" "Oh, indeed, my Lord," came the answer, "indeed I did, it was such a lovely morning."

MARIE CAROLA GALWAY, *The Past Revisited*

MURDER ON HIS MIND

The automatic went flying over the rail into the bitter sea

by RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

CAPTAIN FIELD stopped abruptly. Hair prickled on the back of his head. He stared down at the man securing number two hatch.

Seven months ago he had seen Ed Galt, the image of this man, sprawling on deck with a bullet in his chest. The boatswain had covered him over with a blanket snatched from the steward's quivering hand. Now . . .

The man below caught up a maul. *A maul!* With uncontrolled fury, he whirled the heavy, hammerlike object around his head and brought it crashing down on a wedge. The tough wood splintered but he struck again and again.

Field gave his head a shake. He smoothed out his face. It wouldn't do for the master of the *Marian Eliot* to get jittery.

He swung round, and saw Ben Neilson, the mate, turning his gaze seaward.

John Field walked over to him. "Who's that fellow?" he asked.

Mr. Neilson blinked. He was silent for a moment. "Jim Galt—sir," he said. "He's Ed's younger brother."

Neilson meant: "He's the younger brother of the man I killed for running amuck blind-drunk with a carpenter's maul. The brother of the man who lost me my ship—this ship that's yours now—who made me the target of every newspaper in the country and put me before a jury to fight for my life."

That was what Ben Neilson meant, and he got all the bitterness of it into seven words.

The heavily laden ship drove on through grey, smooth water. Not a lift, not a drop—it was almost as if the ship were listening.

Field drew a deep breath and felt anger rising in him. This meant trouble. "Didn't you recognize him, Mr. Neilson? Didn't you see his name on the crew list?"

The former master of the *Marian* nodded. He contrived to make his three inches of superior height seem like a foot as he looked down at Field. "Yes, sir," he said.

"Well?"

Mr. Neilson's reserve broke down: "If that fellow wants to sign on with me, if he wants to start something, he's welcome to try—sir. I wouldn't raise a hand to keep him off the ship. No matter how crazy he is."

The tremor of rage was plain in his voice. And Field flared in return. These two primitives dared pursue their vendetta in his ship. To them, men standing in the line of fire were as impalpable as ghosts. And the *Marian* was a mere stage for murder!

"I want no cowboys and Indians played in my ship, Mr. Neilson. Remember that."

The Captain's anger somehow restored Neilson's control. "Yes, sir," he said stonily.

"Send down and tell Galt to come at once," Field said, and headed for the bridge ladder.

His face was grim, and his forehead damp under the rim of leather pressing against it. Only ten minutes before, he had been happy to get the smell of the city out of his nostrils, the longshoremen off his deck, and the pilot off his bridge. And now this!

Inside his narrow office under the bridge, he paced back and forth, gripping his hands together. He should have been icy, not angry. But he had served under Ben Neilson when the older man had the command of the ship, and that made it hard.

Oslo, on the other side of the Atlantic, was sixteen days away.

The easiest way to handle this was to slap Galt into irons. It might double his determination to get Neilson. But that was Neilson's worry. The killing wouldn't take place in the ship. Captain John Field and the *Marian* would come through spotless.

Field started towards his chair, then shoved it away with his hand and paced on.

Old Rankin, back on State Street, usually played it safe, usually compromised. When Ben Neilson had been acquitted Rankin had given him a job, but not a command. It wasn't tactful, putting a captain under his former mate. And yet it wasn't as bad as turning him out on a beach full of ex-captains. Also, it gave Rankin a chance to size up John Field.

If this Galt thing blew up in Rankin's face again, if someone else were killed on the *Marian*, then Rankin would rid himself of Captain Field. That meant Captain Field would never have another ship. *You had to be tough these days. You had to look after yourself.* There were too many idle officers with clean licences and no smell about them.

Stop these two grudge fighters as long as they are in this ship. Once ashore, let them slaughter each other and welcome.

The knock on the door was loud, unhesitant. The door opened almost before Field answered.

Jim Galt had been wearing a cap on deck. He had no cap on now—so he could not remove it. Was it a touch of defiance?

" You sent for me, sir," he said in a wooden voice.

Field looked him over. He had the bright-eyed mien of a fanatic and he was too young to conceal wholly the smouldering hate that possessed him. Big bones made a hard face. He was a tall man and dark, very like his brother.

Ed Galt had been a loud, cheery, able seaman but a towering menace when, rarely, he got drunk. To this boy, Ed Galt had been a hero. Field understood. His own older brother had gone down in a torpedoed ship. The feeling of younger brother for elder brother could run deep.

" You're the brother of Ed Galt? " Field said. Galt would have to answer " Yes " to that. It helped, getting a recalcitrant man to answer " Yes " to any question.

" Ed's younger brother, sir," Jim Galt said.

Field's fingers opened and shut. Not only the ship lay in his charge, but all the men on board—all, including this raw young recruit and the older one.

" When you signed on you knew Mr. Neilson was mate of this ship? "

" I knew, sir," Galt said in his wooden voice.

Someone knocked, and then the radio operator's head shoved through the opening door.

" Come in. What is it? "

" Just came through sir," Sparks said, and laid a yellow radio form on the desk.

Field glanced at the form: a request from the Coastguards for ships in these latitudes to be on watch for two men in a small sloop long overdue. He dropped it on his desk.

Abruptly he stood up. " Wait here," he said, and picked up the message. He stepped past Jim Galt out into the corridor.

He found Mike, the old able seaman, who acted as boatswain, overseeing the lowering of the boom serving number four hatch.

The easy way was to put Jim Galt in irons—simple and easy.

Field beckoned the boatswain over to the rail. " Go into Galt's foc'sle and have a careful look through his kit, Mike," he said rapidly. " A bottle or a revolver might mean the death of two men."

Mike's sad brown eyes were intent on Field's face. Mike knew Field and Field knew Mike; as boatswain and mate they had worked close together.

Field realized he wasn't fooling Mike. It wasn't necessary

for a master to contrive to search a man's belongings clandestinely. Mike knew that he wanted information from the foremast grapevine.

"Jim Galt don't drink, sir," Mike said. "If anybody's killed it will be a cold job."

"Any threats?"

"Not a word, sir. Nothing. They was close, them two brothers. He's become a dangerous man."

"Dangerous? Anything to back that up?"

Mike's voice went cold: "Not a thing, sir."

Field nodded. "Have a look, Mike."

He walked forward. As he opened his office door he stopped dead. Galt was gone. Field shot up the bridge ladder. Mr. Neilson stood unharmed in the weather wing. Field turned and descended. He hurried aft.

Jim Galt was leaning against the door-jamb of his foc'sle. There was something truculent about the set of his right shoulder. Mike was inside the small room, squatting over a bag. As soon as he saw the Captain he went on searching it.

Galt straightened. "Thought you'd forgotten me, sir," he said.

"The order was to stay in my office," Field snapped. "Find anything, bo'sun?"

"Nothing, sir," said Mike.

Jim Galt followed Field back to the office and stood again in front of the desk.

"You're not a fool," Field said. "You've made yourself suspected of planning murder simply by signing on the same ship with Mr. Neilson."

The young A.B. smiled.

"I haven't done a thing, sir."

"If you make a hostile move towards Mr. Neilson you'll be killed."

"I'm sure you and he, too, will try—sir."

Field kept his eyes fixed on Galt's face. "You think we can't stop you?"

"I don't know what this is all about, sir," Galt said steadily.

Field waited. It wasn't often a seaman talked to his captain. This one might talk too much.

"I'm not drinking and never did. I brought no weapon aboard, not even a sheath knife. Nothing's wrong with my papers. No vices except I don't like killers. I don't carry a gun like the mate."

He opened his pea-jacket, lifted his arms, and turned round so that the Captain's eyes could not miss the bulge of a pistol anywhere on him.

Field tried again: "Mr. Neilson was acquitted in court. You know I testified in his favour."

Jim Galt nodded. "I heard all about that, sir, though I got back from Singapore too late to be at the trial."

"You think officers stick together," Field said. "They will usually. But that doesn't go for murder. Mr. Neilson shot to save his life."

Jim Galt's dark face went a little pale. He waited, standing rigidly now. He looked like the dangerous man Mike said he was.

"Don't try it," Field said. Just possibly, this could be a boy's harmless bravado. He flipped his hand towards the door. "Even if you succeeded you'd go with him here or in the chair."

Up on the bridge, the crisp March westerly showed no sign of puffing out with the sun. The *Marian* was still making knots in fairly smooth water.

"You carrying a gun?" Field asked Ben Neilson.

The mate jerked his head. "The same automatic—sir. And it's good for another Galt with murder on his mind."

Field stood silent. Neilson was a powerful man, but he was well on in his fifties—almost twice Jim Galt's age. Reaction time in any kind of fight favoured Galt. Further, Galt was the aggressor; he had sought out Neilson's ship. It might be aiding murder to confiscate Neilson's pistol. Anyhow, it wasn't good discipline to doubt an officer.

"Besides," Neilson added, "it's safer in my pocket. He had a look for it in my room last night after he came aboard."

Field frowned. "You force me to point out again that this is my ship," he said harshly. "Why did you keep quiet about this?"

"I had no proof." Neilson was sullen.

"I demand that you report every development to me. Your failure to do so in the first place has got you into a grave situation, Mr. Neilson."

"I can—"

"Your principal defence is my authority and control as master; your last and feeblest defence is that pistol."

Was there a slight slump in Neilson's bearing, a weary hunch to his shoulders? He had paid much for shooting Ed Galt—his ship, reputation, liberty, money. Maybe it was almost understandable, his refusal to report Jim Galt's signing on. He'd reason it meant he still had his nerve left, anyhow.

Field handed him the radio message. "Keep your eyes peeled for this sailing-boat. A couple of fools who'd try to make Halifax under sail from Bermuda in March might get blown anywhere."

Neilson nodded. " The usual north-westers would be right in their teeth."

" I'll put it in the night orders," Field said. " You will sleep with your door locked and your port closed and curtained."

" Yes, sir." The mate's voice was crisp.

Someone's hard knuckles rapped on the door of Field's sleeping-cabin. He was wide awake at the first tap. The ship had been corkscrewing in a rising sea. His eyes sought the luminous dial—four-fourteen.

" Yes," he said, reaching for the light.

Mike's mournful face confronted him.

" Reporting, sir," the boatswain said. " Galt ain't turned in after standing his middle watch. Want me to hunt him up? "

" No. Get your sleep. Thanks, Mike."

Field pulled on his shirt, shoes, and trousers, and grabbed his duffle coat. A man didn't stay out of his warm bunk after a tough midnight-to-four trick merely to admire the scenery.

Neilson had spotted him before he was halfway up the bridge ladder.

" That you, sir? " It was a brusque challenge.

Field answered, and came on up to the head of the ladder. The half moon would be setting soon; already it was brassy and dull.

" Galt hasn't turned in," he said softly. " I'll have a look."

" Don't worry about me, sir."

" I'm not worrying about you, Mr. Neilson," Field said curtly. " Mates are plentiful but ships are scarce."

Half the length of the *Marian* from Ben Neilson he found Galt. Even in the dying moonlight, tension showed in the tall body.

" Go to your foc'sle, Galt," Field said.

" Go to my foc'sle, sir," Galt repeated tonelessly.

Field stepped into his path for a closer look into Galt's face, but the dull moon defeated his eyes. He said: " Officers stick with officers, Galt. But I'm telling you now, man to man, that Neilson had his gun pointed at your brother's leg when he started back to dodge the maul."

" That's what you swore in court," Galt said.

" That's what I'd swear before the great white throne. Would you swear otherwise? "

Silently, Galt moved away.

Field let him depart. He had gone far enough.

" One wrong move, one order disobeyed, and I'll have him in irons," he said to himself.

To themselves, men's motives were always right, but you

couldn't take that into account when you were running a ship. You had to be hard, harder than any of them.

Field walked rapidly through the blackness covering the rolling ship. He glanced behind once. In his room, he hesitated an instant between his revolver and a two-cell flashlight. He pocketed the flashlight and locked up the revolver. A gun, as Mr. Neilson had learnt, fired out of both ends.

He started for the bridge. Again the mate saw him, this time at the foot of the ladder.

"You're looking the wrong way, Mr. Neilson," Field said coldly.

The flattened moon descended below a cloudless horizon. The wind blew harder and the night became very black. This dark hour, Field reckoned, might be the most dangerous of all for the mate.

The ship struggled onwards in the lumping sea. As Field strode by, the mate, Neilson, went rigid at the rail. Field glanced ahead.

Neilson turned to him, pointing. "Looks like a red flare, sir, though it could be some trick of dawn."

Field's eyes slitted. Faint, but it was there, a reddish, widespread glow. He remembered the two adventurers from Bermuda.

"Could that sloop have been carried this far offshore?" he said aloud. "Let's have a look."

Neilson followed him into the chart-house. He pulled off his cap, and bent over the chart.

Field looked at him. Heedless of the mate's night vision he turned his flashlight quickly on the purplish lump almost hidden by white powder and the mate's fair hair. Hastily Neilson jammed on his cap.

"Galt jumped you!" Field said.

"It wasn't on your ship," Neilson said sullenly.

"He made a murderous attack?"

"On the pier the night before we sailed. He told me he was going to kill me and jumped me barehanded. A couple of longshoremen tried to grab him. Before they could pin him down, he snatched a cargo hook from one of them and slung it at me."

"And yet— I've had enough, Mr. Neilson. I'll put Galt in irons, and I'll report your juvenile antics to Rankin by radio and replace you at Oslo."

He walked out of the chart-house, with the mate, defiantly silent, behind him. The reddish glow was still visible.

"Get a bearing on it," Field said curtly. No doubt remained. Galt had come aboard to kill the mate.

Truly, he had had enough of this feud. Stopping Galt fast and getting rid of both of them at the first opportunity was the sensible thing to do. But he might need Galt and every man in the ship if this was no false alarm, this glow up there in the north-east . . .

The sloop had been dismasted. The seas were now too broad to chop her down, but she was icing up and would soon pile enough weight forward to swamp her. She soared high, and sank from sight in violent alternation.

There was no sign of life, but somebody had been burning flares.

Field nodded to the mate. The *Marian Eliot*'s whistle asked the question.

On the sloop, a man slowly thrust his head and one arm stiff as a club up the cabin slide. He did not come out into the wind. He sank out of sight again.

Field looked with bleak distrust at the sea. He had no wish to lose a lifeboat's crew on two fools who had asked for it. The Arctic cold, which made men clumsy and slow, doubled the danger.

"We'll try storm oil," he said aloud, wondering whether oil would be of much use in that frigid sea. He turned to Mr. Neilson: "Float a buoyed line down to them. Let them do the work."

The line tailed out, while Field manœuvred the ship. The cork float touched the sloop's side. The *Marian*'s siren thundered repeatedly. But no man came out on deck to make it fast. The heart was out of them, and perhaps consciousness, too.

"I could get away a boat, sir," Neilson said.

An impulse stirred Field. He rejected it. He'd be risking command. Yet it might be the right treatment for these two desperate characters. They might try to outdo each other, and that would be the saving of the man or men in the sloop.

"O.K., Mr. Neilson," he said. "I won't risk a full crew. I'll put you and Galt in a lifeboat and drop you down on a line to take them off. It's worked before, the lifeboat on a line."

Ben Neilson was staring at him.

"Perhaps you can beat a little sense back into Galt—and yourself. Perhaps the job will do it."

"I don't like it, sir," the mate said harshly. "I'd rather try it alone."

Meaningly, Field glanced at the strapping young second mate. Crispen was an eager beaver, ready for anything.

Neilson growled. "You've got me," he said bitterly.

Galt, like most of the men off duty, was down on the lower bridge. Field beckoned him to the foot of the ladder. "I'm sending the mate and you down to them in a boat."

Galt's dark face showed shock; then he scowled. "I thought they always called for volunteers on a tough job like that, sir," he said.

"That's right," said Field. "Well?"

Galt's eyes lifted to the mate's back, up on the bridge, and came down to Captain Field. "Why, yes, sir, I'll volunteer," he said, grinning thinly.

Field raised an arm to point. "You don't know those poor fellows in the sloop. So you don't care about them, hey? All you want is to play cat-and-mouse with Mr. Neilson."

Galt reddened angrily. "I'm volunteering," he said.

Field loaded a rifle in his cabin. He tucked it under his duffle coat, ascended to the bridge, and stowed it in the leeward wing—for luck.

Young Mr. Crispen was willing, but too eager. Field took over the lowering of the lifeboat. She was within scant feet of the surface when the *Marian* flung herself to starboard. The lifeboat smashed hard against her side. Neilson and Galt clung to the thwarts.

Startled, wincing, the men on the falls held their lines.

"Keep lowering!" Field shouted harshly. Quick sweat was starting on his forehead.

The lifeboat touched water. They got her clear of the *Marian*. Two boat-lengths from the side, gusts hit her.

Neilson felt for his gun, a meaningful gesture, and sat bolt upright in the stern sheets.

Captain Field raced to the bridge.

Mike paid out line smoothly. The boat pitched and dived like some frantic sea creature fighting to throw a hook. Bags slung fore and aft, dribbling oil into the icy water, failed to quell the seas.

Fingers gripping the engine-room telegraph handle, eyes on the long line to the boat and the wind streaks on the sea, Field kept the *Marian* dead to windward of the sloop.

Neilson stayed aft, studying the sloop; Galt forward, tending the line. The distance between them comforted Field.

When the lifeboat drifted close to the sloop Field strained his eyes. He had to prevent his boat from fouling the clutter of spars composing the sloop's sea-anchor. A good punch from that broken mast would hole her. He kicked the *Marian* ahead a few revolutions, then signalled Mike to pay out line.

Field ran his sleeve across his forehead. The two men were a long way from the *Marian*. Of course, if Neilson kept away

from Galt, watched him, and made him do all the work, he'd be fairly safe from the seaman. But it was a tricky two-man job, that rescue.

Galt, boat-hook in hand, jabbed at the sea. He caught the heavy line to the sea-anchor and struggled to drag it aboard.

Mr. Neilson scrambled forward. He thrust himself between Galt and the gunwale, reaching far over to grab the line.

Field's breath caught in his throat. His eyes flicked to his rifle. This was it. Galt could lurch, lift his knee, or let the boat-hook seem to jerk, and hit the stretching mate in the back. The icy water would do the rest—fast.

Abruptly Galt stopped struggling with the hooked line. His gaze fixed on Neilson's back.

Galt's body started convulsively. He heaved on the boat-hook, bringing the line within Neilson's reach. The mate grabbed it. Together they brought it in.

Field's relief was momentary. Maybe Galt would get the two men off the sloop, then settle with Neilson. Field signalled Mike: "Slack away!"

They were on their own now, those two small figures. Working together, they brought the lifeboat in alongside the sloop.

Neilson motioned curtly. Galt held the boats in contact. Neilson waited his chance. He sprang across to the sloop.

The men on the *Marian*'s deck yelled as jubilantly as if the job were done. Field squeezed the brass telegraph handle, sweating ice.

Neilson came staggering up with a body across his back. At the rail Galt's hands clamped onto the motionless man and wrenched him over into the bottom of the lifeboat.

Neilson turned towards the cabin again, moving with frantic speed. The top of a sea smashed over the sloop's bow and charged aft. White water and flying foam hid everything.

The sloop showed again. Neilson's bent body came into sight. He had the other man. He staggered on towards the rail of the sinking sloop. Stretching out precariously, he tried to lift the man within reach of Galt's arms.

The boats dropped out of sight in the trough of a big sea. As they rose on an attacking crest, a slit of water showed between the two boats.

By the submerged rail, Neilson, mittened hands clutching, was fighting to regain his balance. His thick body toppled. He splashed into the sea.

The blood drained from Field's face, from his cold hands. That gap between the boats could have been caused by a snapped line or a slacked line. Galt could have been responsible.

Galt let the limp body he gripped slide into the bottom of the lifeboat. He snatched up the boat-hook, peered over the side—looking for Neilson.

Galt clambered aft, watching the water. At the stern he stopped. He flung the pole aside, and put a foot on the rail. Crouching, he jumped far out into the sea.

Field gripped the telegraph-stand.

Galt came up, floundering, swimming with frantic vigour. A sea screened him and the boats from sight.

He showed again. Now he was headed towards the sloop. He seemed to be hardly moving. Burdened, he flailed mightily with one arm. The yellow of Neilson's head flashed suddenly beside him.

Galt caught hold of the sloop's low rail with one hand. He ducked under the bitter water, and came up with Neilson's body plastered limply over his head and shoulders. He struggled to heave Neilson off him and in over the side. By inches, he shifted the mate over onto the deck.

Kicking, clutching the rail with both hands, Galt pulled himself up, and flopped head-first into the waterlogged sloop. With movements horribly clumsy, he gathered Neilson into his arms, edged forward, and waited.

A gap stretched wide between the boats. It seemed as if the sloop must sink under him. The two boats clashed sides. Galt, still holding Neilson, dived from the sloop over into the bottom of the lifeboat.

Field drew blessed breath.

In an instant Galt rose into sight. He jerked his arm.

Field shoved the telegraph to slow ahead. The *Marian* crept along, separating lifeboat and sloop. Shortly, Field stopped the ship and signalled Mike at the capstan, where the line was secured. The boatswain took in line cautiously, slowly. Field glanced back to estimate the boat's progress.

The sloop was gone.

Neilson's head lifted above the rail of the lifeboat. He was retching. Jim Galt kept to his feet, swinging his arms, stamping, struggling up when the boat's motion knocked him down. He needed free hands to grab and hook on two boat tackles.

He did that job, fore and aft, though Neilson tried to help.

The lifeboat came up, with two nerve-shattering crunches, against the ship. Galt lowered the rescued sailors over into lifted arms.

Ben Neilson repulsed Galt's hand, snarled at other helping seamen, and climbed laboriously down to the deck himself.

Field thrust through close to the tottering mate. "Sling your gun overboard," Field whispered. "Now, Neilson, 'now!"

"I will not!" Neilson said.

Galt was watching, frozen-faced.

Neilson groped in the pocket of his stiffened duffle coat and jerked out an ugly automatic. He turned and laid the glinting pistol in Jim Galt's hand.

Galt looked at the thing his fingers held, the gun that had killed his brother. He cleared his throat. "I guess Ed was sort of tough when—when he was drunk," he said. "I never saw him like that."

"He was a different man, Jim," Neilson said quietly. "He wasn't Ed Galt."

"Yes," said Jim. "I guess that's so."

He flipped his wrist, and the automatic went flying far over the rail of the *Marian* into the bitter sea. He straightened up and thrust the hand that had held it into the outstretched hand of the man who had shot his brother.

Captain Field climbed to the bridge. He shoved the telegraph over to *Full Ahead.*

* * *

COMMAND PERFORMANCE

I went with Hillert to look for the chimp. We found him. He was high in a cottonwood tree, displaying all the virtuosity of the horizontal bar at a dizzy height. Tremendous giant swings, now with the forefeet, now with the hind legs, somersaults in which he caught himself at the last breathless second of safety, these he performed with flawless technique and gaudy showmanship for an audience of one, a dainty female chimpanzee who sat in the fork of an adjoining tree, goading him on to even more prodigious feats by clapping her hands, and scratching herself.

Hillert called, but Charlie would not come down. This was his day. This, for him, was a greater moment than a command performance before the crowns of Europe or the President of the United States. His soul was in his art. He went through his entire repertoire again.

Then I had an idea. At the point in this display at which, in the ring, I always summoned in the following act, I took my whistle from my pocket and blew it. Charlie responded at once. Down from the tree he came, and took a deep bow before his lady love.

FRED BRADNA, *The Big Top*

HONEYMOON

Where we shall be is a secret from every person on earth

by MARK VAN DOREN

WHOM should she pray to? Russell had told her it would be all right—again and again he had told her, and hugged her to prove he was not mistaken. But all it proved was that he had confidence in their scheme. His scheme, rather, though when he insisted she agreed. And she still agreed, for she would do anything Russell wanted. She was worried, nevertheless. Somebody might see something, and write to Mr. Lord. That would be worse than Russell could ever understand.

The most Russell had said against Mr. Lord was that he was a stinker for refusing to let them live in the cottage the first week after they were married. Only a week, and they wouldn't hurt the cottage. It was closed, like the big house, while Mr. Lord enjoyed himself in Florida. And who knew more than they did about taking care of it? They had done enough work there, outside and in, to deserve this little favour.

It was Russell, of course, who asked. He had written Mr. Lord to say they were getting married on St. Valentine's Day, and could they have the cottage if they left everything as they found it? They didn't have the money for a trip. They weren't even sure they had enough to live on afterwards. It was a sudden idea, getting married; but it might be that he would have to go on working at Sunwise Farm, and she at Mrs. Waldron's, for months and months before they had a place together. That was why it was so important to have a honeymoon, even if it was in the cottage. A couple of mice, Russell called it, making a nest where they didn't belong. But it was better than nothing.

Of course he didn't write all this to Mr. Lord. He merely asked the favour. And when Mr. Lord refused it, he didn't even say he was glad they were getting married. Russell was mad about that, too; but not so mad as he would have been if he had known why. She thought she did. As a matter of fact, she knew she did. All the times Mr. Lord had tried to get her to go there with him, on summer nights when there were no guests, no people at all to know—it was perfectly safe, he had said,

smiling at her so horribly when he said it, stopping his car and whispering to her while she stood and hated him and wished he would die—she could never tell Russell about those times.

They were the reason, of course. And they were part of the reason she was worried. If somebody saw something, and told Mr. Lord! Then *he* would be mad—mad enough, maybe, to tell Russell stories that weren't true.

Cherry shivered, waiting in her little room over Mrs. Waldron's kitchen for the sound of Russell's truck. Mrs. Waldron thought they were going away for a week—really away—and so did Gus, the foreman at the Farm. There hadn't been any trouble about that; and Mrs. Waldron had been nice enough this morning to say she was glad they were getting married, and to give her the box of handkerchiefs that now was in the suitcase with her other things. Mrs. Waldron wouldn't be here when Russell came for her. Cherry was glad of that, for she didn't think she could lie any more about where it was they were going.

They were to be married at four o'clock, by the Town Clerk in Tamworth, and Russell was coming at three. By five, when it was almost dark, they would be at the cottage, and no matter how cold it was at first, Russell had said, they could begin their honeymoon. The shutters were tight enough to keep candlelight from showing through. The electricity was off, of course, so they would have only candles. And there probably wouldn't be any sparks from the fire-place chimney that people could see. Who would be passing anyway? Russell didn't have a doubt in his head.

But she did, and she wanted to pray. All day, though, she had wondered how to do it, and to whom. She didn't know about such things. God himself—she didn't dare do that, for weren't she and Russell lying and stealing? She couldn't ask God to help. Or the others they talked about at church.

They wouldn't be interested in seeing to it that Mr. Lord never learnt anything. She and Russell were going to cook in the fire-place, and they would sleep in front of it, on blankets he was bringing from the Farm.

Perhaps there was nobody in the other world that cared what she and Russell did on St. Valentine's Day.

St. Valentine. Who was St. Valentine?

She was ignorant about the saints. That wasn't the kind of church Mrs. Waldron took her to. Maisie Sullivan would know. But she hadn't seen Maisie for months, and anyhow she couldn't ask her. Nobody in this world must know.

St. Valentine. She shut her eyes where she stood, one hand

still resting on the window-frame through which Russell's red truck would be visible in a few minutes, and said the name several times.

Then she found she had begun.

" St. Valentine," she was saying in a low voice, " St. Valentine, whoever and wherever you are, will you be good to Russell and me—Cherry Beckwith—will you help us tonight, will you make sure nobody sees? You don't know us, because we are not your people, but we are being married on your day, and tonight the honeymoon that Russell wanted is beginning. But where we shall be is a secret from every person on earth, including Mr. Lord. Especially Mr. Lord.

" Tonight, and every night for a week, and every day, be with us two, St. Valentine, and bless our honeymoon. There is nobody else who can help. I have no family, and Russell's is far away. There is nobody to help or bless us. I have no right to ask it, but will you be our saint? If you are listening, please understand that Russell wouldn't like to have me pray. But that is because he has no doubts. Please include him, though. Now he is coming, and I must go. Thank you, St. Valentine, if you have listened. I am Cherry Beckwith, that soon shall be Cherry Hart. Good-bye, good-bye."

" Hullo, Cherry."

Russell was calling up to her from the corner of the greenhouse. He was calling loud because he hadn't turned the engine off, and he was saying nothing but her name. He never said things like " darling " or " sweetheart." Her name itself was an endearment to him, and the way he said it made her like it too.

He had to call her again before she seemed to hear. Then she waved, picked up her suitcase, and ran down.

" What were you doing, Cherry! Changing your mind? "

They talked very little on the way to Tamworth, and on the way back as it grew darker and colder, even less. There was no snow, for a change, but the ground was frozen till the ruts in the cottage lane looked like iron rails when they got there.

It still wasn't dark enough, Russell said, so they would drive around for half an hour. " We should have killed time in town, getting a drink or something," he added, self-conscious all at once.

" No, honey, this is better." She sat closer to him.

They drove up Roberts Hill to North Tamworth, paused there, and returned in frosty darkness which no star, no planet modified. Russell had planned to leave the truck in Simpson's barn, an unused hulk of a building up the road a little way from the

cottage. As he shut the big doors behind him, Cherry seized his free hand and clung to it. The other hand held the bag into which their blankets and utensils were stuffed. The bag, slung over his shoulder, was awkward and heavy, and sometimes he needed the hand Cherry had in hers; but she never let it go.

"Will it be all right, honey, are you sure?" she asked. They were almost there.

"You know it will," he said. He was not impatient with her.

Then they were in the living-room, feeling their way around. It was as cold as a funeral vault, but before Russell struck a match, even, he lifted all the windows and felt the shutter slats, to convince himself that they were tight.

"Now, Cherry!" And he struck one of those long blue-headed matches he always carried. It flickered on the covered chairs, the ghostly sofa opposite the fire-place, and the litter of seeds and shells that mice had left on the hearth.

"Here!"

He hastened to fumble in the bag for a candle. When he found it, he lit it with another match and set it in one of the empty holders on the mantel. Cherry stared at it as if it were the only life in the world.

"That's good," she managed to get out. She was shaking.

"I didn't tell you," said Russell. "I chopped plenty of wood up at the place and brought it down here the day before yesterday. It's outside. You wait, Cherry."

"No!" She went with him and helped him carry in enough for their first fire. And when it was blazing she drew him near to her—nearer even than before—and kissed him so eagerly, so desperately, that he said, for all his happiness in the excitement of her doing so: "You're still afraid. Listen, it's all right."

"I know it is." But it wasn't. There must be some crack of light showing, somewhere; and when the fire mounted in the chimney she was sure a spark or two must be shooting up into the darkness.

"Who would notice?" Russell insisted. "Who would care?"

She got her mind off it as soon as he pulled from the bag the little frying-pan they had bought this afternoon at Tamworth.

"Oh!" she cried. "We didn't bring my suitcase out of the truck. The eggs are in it, and everything."

"Lord!" said Russell, and did not see how she trembled at the word. "But you can be getting the blankets out while I go for it. Back in a jiffy!"

She went with him again, however, and on the way back stopped him in the lane.

"When we opened the door," she said, "do you suppose—"

"I certainly don't," he said. "Anyway, we'd have seen a car passing. There wasn't a car! Was there? We'd still know by the lights, downhill or uphill. You've got the jitters, Cherry. Wait till we're warm again."

"Russell! Isn't that a crack of light from the side window, there by the barberry bush?"

"Don't see any, and you don't either."

"But what if someone did?"

"Who? The state police?" he laughed, pulling her on.

"Oh, honey, don't say that!"

They *would* notify Mr. Lord. And worse.

"All right. I'll just do this." He put both arms round her in the pitch-dark lane and kissed every part of her cold face, over and over again.

"There! That better?"

They went in. But Cherry whirled at once to shut the door.

"Still jittery," said Russell. "You'd think the police were out there."

"Don't say that, either."

But he was busy with the blankets. The room was warm now, at least in front of the fire, and Russell was spreading all of them out.

"I know what," he said, straightening suddenly and coming to her with his face flushed, his eyes shining. "You don't believe me because we're not really married yet. Look here, Cherry."

But she ducked away from him and got the suitcase open. "Here's everything," she said, pretending not to know what he meant. Her heart was pounding too.

He stood by her, self-conscious and uncertain, while she got the eggs out of the tin box she had packed them in, and the slices of sweet ham. He watched her without a word as she proceeded with their supper. His happiness, she knew, was greater than his unhappiness because she had pretended not to understand. It was better this way, she kept saying to herself.

They ate almost in silence, sitting next to each other on the floor, facing the fire. The fire made the only noise there was, a hissing and a cracking that was good to hear, both of them thought, as they looked at it and listened.

Then there was another noise. A car.

The car stopped.

It waited while they waited. When it started again, they knew it had turned into the lane.

"Oh, St. Valentine!" Cherry thought she had said it under

her breath, but Russell turned from the window to which he had run and said: "What's that?"

"I didn't say anything," she whispered in her terror. "Russell, what do you suppose—"

"Listen," was all he said. "Don't move."

A man's voice, crisp and suspicious, came clearly to them from beyond the window-glass and the shutter.

"I'd swear," it said, "I saw a light in there."

"I still think it was a reflection from our own lights when we came round the bend." This was another man, a quieter one, with a voice not so distinct.

"The door's locked, of course, but I remember this shutter. It's the only one you can open from outside. Lord ought to have it fixed. Lucky now, though. I'll have a look."

"St. Valentine!" Cherry knew she couldn't be heard this time, for even if she had wanted to she couldn't have cried aloud. "St. Valentine! Now—if you ever heard me. Please!"

The police were having trouble with the catch, but pretty soon that would be over, Cherry said, and then—

"St. Valentine! If you heard me, help us now!"

The shutter strained, but still it didn't budge. Russell tiptoed to the door, slid the bolt noiselessly into place, and came back—this time to Cherry's side. He had opened the door with Mr. Lord's key, the extra one he was trusted with because he took care of things in the winter. Trusted with! thought Cherry. But her eyes never left the shutter.

Why was the light in the room growing brighter? For it was, and the fire hadn't changed.

Both of them saw it at once, and involuntarily shrank as if to escape it. But it came from no single source—not from the fire, not from the candle above the fire. It was brightening everywhere, as if the whole room were aflame. And the brightness was growing. It filled the corners, it made the slip-covers luminous, it glistened on the picture-glass, it lit points of fire on the empty candle sockets, it came in white waves over the floor.

Even Russell was pale. He stared everywhere, above and around him, as at something that could not be.

But the colour was returning to Cherry's cheeks. She was the brave one. She thought she knew. And as the light brightened again and again and again, she did know.

"Don't worry, honey," she whispered.

Russell heard only the shutter as it tore open and two faces looked blankly in.

Was it because the police were surprised by so much light

that they had this unseeing look on their broad faces? They didn't blink, either, or turn to each other and nod.

"Well, I guess I was wrong," said one.

"Come on." The other was fastening the shutter. "I told you it was our own lights."

The voices retreated, the car started, and soon there was nothing to hear except the hiss of the fire, and of Russell's breath as it let itself out suddenly.

"You see?" said Cherry, feeling how cold his hand was when she took it. "I told you not to worry. *I'm* not worried any more."

"This light!" He was still breathless, though the brightness was decreasing now.

"What about it?" Cherry dropped to her knees on the top blanket, forgetting their unfinished supper.

"What *about* it!" Russell, following her there, was utterly confounded. "What *about* it!"

"It's black light," she said. "St. Valentine's light. It's only for us. It wasn't for them—those two men—or anybody else. It's—"

"Valentine! Say, I got you one and never gave it to you."

He searched the inside pocket of his coat and brought out a card whose tinsel glistened in the room like a star.

"Oh! That's pretty." She pulled his head to her and kissed it.

"But this light!" He was stubborn, and wouldn't give up. "What happened, Cherry? What do you think happened?"

"Never mind, honey. Look—it's going out anyway."

For it was. It went out by degrees, as it had come, until the fire was all there was, and the candle that both of them forgot till morning.

★ ★ ★

CLUB SERVANTS

I like the sound of a club which Lord Stanley of Alderley says he founded some years ago. "There is no subscription, and the members are, for the most part, unknown to each other. The only condition of membership is that whenever they write to a Government Department they should end their letter:

You are, my Dear Sir,
My Humble and Obedient Servant."

ATTICUS, *in The Sunday Times*

BESIDE THE SEASIDE

Come unto these yellow sands . . .

Looking back, I cannot see a cloud on the terrestrial horizon—I see nothing but a blaze of sunshine; descents of slippery grass to moons of snow-white shingle, cold to the bare flesh; red promontories running out into a sea that was like sapphire; and our happy clan climbing, bathing, boating, lounging, chattering, all the hot day through. EDMUND GOSSE, *Father and Son*

Kaleidoscope

At night the Front like coloured barley-sugar; but now
Soft blue, all soda, the air goes flat over flower-beds,
Blue railings and beaches; below, half-painted boats, bow
Up, settle in sand, names like Moss Rose and Dolphin
Drying in a breeze that flicks at the ribs of the tide.
The chalk coastline folds up its wings of Beachy Head
And Worthing, fluttering white over water like brides.
Regency Squares, the Pavilion, oysters and mussels and gin.

Piers like wading confectionery, esplanades of striped tulip.
Cricket began here yesterday, the air heavy, suitable
For medium-paced bowlers; but deck-chairs mostly were vacant
Faces white over startling green. Later, trains will decant
People with baskets, litter and opinions, the seaside's staple
Ingredients. Today Langridge pushes the ball for unfussed
Singles; ladies clap from check rugs, talk to retired colonels;
On tomato-red verandas the scoring rate is discussed . . .

ALAN ROSS, *Cricket at Brighton*

Bathing was Fun!

From Iron House it was only a short walk to the shore. At high tide the sea came right up the shingle beach to the road, but at low tide it went back and back, leaving behind great stretches of hard sand, all ripple-marked and shining, wonderful sand to dig in, to build moated houses with, and tip out as puddings from little pails; more wonderful still, such sands to gallop on! At Littlehampton we not only bathed and paddled, and collected long trails of seaweed and the tiniest of blue shells among the pebbles, but we also rode for miles along the sands among rippling, receding wavelets, with the sea wind in our faces. Mother's tall thoroughbred, our pony, and my Father's cob had

come by road from London, and the waggonette too, so there were also drives in the lovely Sussex countryside and blackberrying picnics in the Angmering woods. We drove to Arundel Castle with its tilting yard and vast gardens, and to Rustington. My Father painted a picture there, and we used to drive him to and fro . . .

Bathing was fun, especially if the tide was so far out that we had to get a man on a horse to draw our bathing machine over the wide sands and right into the sea. Like everybody else we all wore blue serge combinations from our necks to our ankles, where tapes held them in position. Mother wore a blue serge skirt as well, and Daddy was obliged to bathe farther along the beach beyond two breakwaters. Mother did not swim much; she held our hands and made us dip, and walked us out into deep water to try to teach us to float, with much spluttering and squealing and doubling up when a wave struck us and tickled; trying to swim was easier than floating, but splashing was the best, that and the race back to the machine. We washed the sand from our feet in our buckets and Nannie grumbled at our sticky hair and taught us to wring out our sodden suits and carry them to the shingle to dry in the sun.

KATE TERRY GIELGUD, *An Autobiography*

Summer Lovers

Now all the green immensity of sea
Lays down its pebbled floor of light
Cool and clear across the harbour pool;
Cobbles of turquoise glancing in the sun
Look firm enough to walk upon.

The birds walk there and are gone,
White flash against a flawless sky,
Scything blue swathes of brilliant flight.
We lean bare arms against the mossy wall
And say no word at all, but watch.

Shimmer of dresses on the summer strand
Nervous and happy in their new festivity
Circle and dazzle, glowing bright:
And always the imperishable light
Shining on lovers, you and me.

Always the green immensity of sea.

ROBERT FURNIVAL

The Silver Band

Let wail of gulls,
The sunbows in the breakers and the breeze
Which blows the sand into the sandwiches,
Let castles crumbling in the rise of tide,
Let cool dank caves and dark interstices
Where, underneath the squelching bladder-wrack,
Lurk stinging fin and sharp, marauding claw
Ready to pierce the rope-soled bathing-shoe,
Let darting prawn and helpless jelly-fish
Spell joy or misery to youth. For we,
We older ones, have thoughts of higher things.
Whether we like to sit with Penguin books
In sheltered alcoves farther up the cliff,
Or to eat winkles on the Esplanade,
Or to play golf along the crowded course,
Or on a twopenny borough council chair
To doze away the strains of Humoresque,
Adapted for the cornet and the drums
By the conductor of the Silver Band . . .

JOHN BETJEMAN, *Beside the Seaside*

Beachcombers

Every seat is occupied; the boats and small yachts are filled; some of the children pour pebbles into the boats, some carefully throw them out; wooden spades are busy; sometimes they knock each other on the head with them, sometimes they empty pails of sea-water on a sister's frock. There is a squealing, squalling, screaming, shouting, singing, bawling, howling, whistling, tin-trumpeting, and every luxury of noise. Two or three hands work away; niggers clatter their bones, a conjurer in red throws his heels in the air; several harps strum merrily different strains; fruit-sellers push baskets into folks' faces . . . Such a volume of uproar, such a complete organ of discord—I mean a whole organful—cannot be found anywhere else on the face of the earth in so comparatively small a space. It is a sort of triangular plot of beach crammed with everything that ordinarily annoys the ear and offends the sight. Yet you hear nothing and see nothing; it is perfectly comfortable, perfectly jolly and exhilarating, a preferable spot to any other. A sparkle of sunshine on the breakers, a dazzling gleam from the white foam, a warm, sweet air, light and brightness and champagniness; altogether lovely.

RICHARD JEFFERIES, *The Open Air*

THE SEVENTH MUSKET

He slipped off quietly in the Spanish dusk, with thirty trusted sabres behind him

by MICHAEL GILBERT

NEXT to Julian Sanchez, who was so powerful that he was almost a regular Commander of troops, El Torino was the greatest of the bandit leaders in the west of Spain. His task, self-imposed, was to exist in the foothills of the Sierra de Gata and Sierra de Gredos, in the middle course of the River Tagus, and to exact from the French an ample and growing toll for the evils which his country and his family had suffered at their hands.

His father had been executed by shooting. His two brothers executed by the garotte. His wife had died in child-birth, in the hills, during the unhappy winter in which the trouble had started. His son, a boy of fifteen, had been hanged by the heels in the market square of Toledo until the sun and the flies had finished him. (That was after El Torino had nailed the afrancesado Governor of Toledo to a board and auctioned named portions of him for charity.) His mother—he had no idea what had become of his mother. He hoped she was safely dead.

El Torino intercepted French messengers, cut off detachments, and even, after the most careful and detailed preparation, attacked and destroyed small regular posts. Above all, he occupied the attention of ten times his number of French soldiers, for which the English General was exceedingly grateful. Not that El Torino worried his head unduly about the English General. He did not love him as a brother, but he respected him as a master of war. And so, did he intercept a messenger, the message would go full speed northward to Frenada.

" For messages, like fish," observed Torino to his principal Lieutenant, " are doubly acceptable when fresh."

His Lieutenant, a man of few words, nodded.

Neither looked in the least like a brigand. El Torino had once been a lawyer, and still had the air of one, with his neat dark clothes and his pinched, ascetic face. His companion, a big man in black, might have been an undertaker.

They were seated among the rocks overlooking the village and bridge of Peraleda. The village was deserted. The bridge, to the naked eye, was unguarded.

"You were right," said the Lieutenant at last. "Here they come."

"I am frequently right," agreed El Torino. "But this was a simple matter. The summer campaign is impending. We know that messengers must pass. This is the only point at which they can with any convenience cross the river."

"They are fifteen minutes away." The Lieutenant screwed his eyes up against the glare. "A small escort. Chasseurs, by their plumes."

It was, indeed, almost an insultingly small escort for that time and place. But Edouard Philippe Chrétien Le Duc, Staff Major in the French Army of Andalusia, had his own theories about escorts, as about most things. He thought that large slow-moving escorts were often more of a danger than a protection. They took a lot of getting together, and the news of their assembly travelled fast. However large the escort, the guerrilleros, given time, could always collect three times the number. So where was your safety? On the other hand, as he had proved before, if you slipped off quietly at dusk, with twenty or thirty trusted sabres behind you, and rode with a loose rein, you could pass any danger before it had time to materialize.

Major Le Duc was riding at the head of his troop, regarding the Spanish countryside with the usual mixture of feelings that it inspired. Most of his fellow French soldiers had come to hate Spain. He hated it too, sometimes: for its starkness and sameness; for its lack of decent living; for its endless bleak hostility. Sometimes, too, he loved it, for the colour that it lent to everyday things, the salt of danger and urgency that it added to life. Had not five years of it made a man out of what had formerly been only a gentleman?

Why, were he to meet his brother François now—and with François, who could guess *where* one would meet him next?—he could stand beside him, proudly. François might be more accomplished, François might be high in the Councils of the Emperor, but it was surely something to set in the opposite scale if you were the only officer in the Army of Andalusia who could be trusted by Marshal Soult with a vitally important message, with the smallest of escorts, on a route where trouble seemed certain.

And trouble arrived; when the troop was exactly halfway over the bridge of Peraleda. It started at the moment when the leading troopers, with Major Le Duc, had already crossed, whilst the rearguard, under the Sergeant-Major, was cantering up to it. And it took a most unexpected form.

Beside the bridge-head stood a gallows—not, at that time, an uncommon enough decoration to merit a second glance. It was

a single upright, with a cross-piece and what now looked like a long strip of dried seaweed hanging on a chain from it. At the moment that the last horse from the leading cavalry cleared the bridge, the gallows-post started to fall. It fell slowly, ponderously, and precisely across the bridge, and blocked it completely.

The rearguard clattered to a halt behind it. Even at this juncture it seemed nothing but a bizarre accident. The Sergeant-Major jumped from his horse and tried the obstacle with his foot.

Then there came a fluting whistle; then a single shot.

The Sergeant-Major put one hand into the front of his coat. With a foot up on the beam he looked, for a grotesque moment, as if he were going to make an oration. Then his knees hinged, he tumbled backwards over the low parapet of the bridge, and disappeared under the brown water.

There followed a brisk volley.

Both parties of horsemen broke for shelter. The half-troop who had not crossed went back. Before they could get out of reach two more men had been toppled from their saddles. The dozen men who had crossed were more fortunately placed, or seemed so. They were in the main street and the houses and enclosures offered shelter. They dismounted and scattered.

" Excellent," said El Torino.

" As planned," agreed his Lieutenant. " I do not think they will survive long. No doubt they will die bravely."

" No doubt they will die," said El Torino.

An hour later he stood looking down at what lay twisting painfully on the ground. It was Major Le Duc. He had suffered in the fighting among the horses, but he was not yet dead. The eleven troopers who had crossed with him were luckier. They were dead.

The Frenchman opened his mouth to speak and the two Spaniards craned forward. He said one word. It sounded like " François."

" His patron saint, perhaps," suggested the Lieutenant.

" Somewhere on him he will be carrying the message," said El Torino. " A search should reveal it."

" It would save time," suggested the Lieutenant, " if we were to ask him to reveal just where it is hidden."

" He might scruple to tell us."

" We could no doubt overcome his scruples," observed the Lieutenant, seriously.

The township of Frenada, near the upland borders of Portugal, lay clustered in a hodge-podge of dusty browns and bleak greys under the April sky.

In the cramped front room of a house in the single cobbled main street that bisected the small square, Captain Lord Fitzroy Somerset sat on the corner of the table, swinging his neat legs. Out of the door—the hovel had no proper window—he could just see the church, dominating the square with its bat-infested dome and lop-sided cross.

He said, looking down at the other occupant of the room, " The Peer's in a shocking temper this morning."

Major Scovell looked up absent-mindedly. He was a tall man, who carried in his brown face the only outward hint that he had lived the last two years of his life in the open air, away from the grey aisles of the University Library where he had been reared.

He was fingering a thin strip of parchment which he was trying to flatten onto the table top. It had been so tightly rolled that every time his long sensitive fingers let go, it curled itself up again like a spring.

" Try pinning down the corners," suggested Fitzroy.

" An excellent idea," said Major Scovell. " I haven't any pins. What did you say about the Peer? "

" I said he was in a shocking temper."

" How do you happen to know? "

" The Peer," said Fitzroy, " is not a man who troubles to conceal his feelings. If he is happy, you may hear that great horse-laugh of his from Frenada to the Coa. If he is not happy—well, you know how it is—a sort of icy wind starts to blow—"

" And why should it be blowing this morning? "

" I didn't get the whole of it. But it's something about the guard muskets."

" Guard muskets? " Scovell looked vague. Many of the operations of war seemed quite meaningless to him. " Guard muskets? You mean those muskets they carry when they are on guard duty? "

" Yes. Special muskets. Clean slings, burnished barrels, and goodness knows what. There's a special set kept for Headquarters guard."

" And someone has lost one. Or sold it to the Portuguese."

" On the contrary," said Fitzroy. " As far as I could gather, the Peer discovered this morning that they'd returned one too many. What *is* that paper? "

" It was—is—a message. It was dispatched by General of Army Soult to Jourdan who is, in name, Supreme Commander, under King Joseph, again in name, of the five armies opposed to us."

" They don't show the deuce of a lot of co-operation," agreed Fitzroy complacently. " If they got together, under someone like

the Peer, they could wipe us out in no time at all. Where did it come from?"

"It was wrapped round a split needle, which was inserted into the epaulette of a French officer. The officer fell into the hands of El Torino."

"Poor devil," said Fitzroy.

Major Scovell made no comment. He had gradually become hardened to that aspect of war in the Peninsula.

"It was brought to me," he said, "together with certain identifiable—er—portions of the officer in question, late last night. I am endeavouring to work on it now."

"In code?"

"Of course."

"But you can read it, can't you? You're a brainy devil."

"There is no question of brain. It is a matter of system." Major Scovell spoke as a patient adult to an excitable boy. "*All* messages are in the same cipher. The Great Paris Cipher. Which, between you and me, is a Great Paris Nonsense. Because once you have found out who's who in one message it's the same in all the others."

"Only the names are in code?"

"Names, numbers, military formations. There's quite a lot of it. But we've been at it a long time, too. There are precious few of them that we can't read. For instance if this message—" Scovell twiddled the tiny scrap thoughtfully between his fingers—"if it said that 1280 had withdrawn from 7720 with all his 660 under a threat from 1300, we should at once know that Soult had left Cadiz, with his siege artillery."

"I see," said Fitzroy. "Easy, isn't it? Under a threat from 1300?"

"1300," said Major Scovell with a wintry smile, "is the Peer."

"You are quite certain that you laid out six muskets?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's not a matter about which you might have made a mistake?"

"No, sir. It's like this, sir—." The Quartermaster paused. He had known the General for a long time; had been with him in India. Sometimes he wanted explanations. At other times, very definitely, he did not.

Since the General said nothing he persevered: "We use drafts to make up the Headquarters guard. Convalescents on their way back from Belem, new recruits on their way up to the line. Sometimes there's plenty. Sometimes it's difficult to find even six."

"I see. And last night it was difficult?"

"Yes, sir. One big draft went off yesterday. Took most of 'em. Then that other lot that was due in yesterday was late. I couldn't put 'em straight on guard off the road. Seeing as how they were going straight on again this morning."

"But you found your six?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who were they?"

The Quartermaster delved painfully in the rag-bag of his mind. Even for a General who was notorious for counting every nail in the horseshoes of his cavalry this was coming it a bit strong.

"Two Rangers," he said at last. "A Rifleman, a dismount from the German legion. A gunner, and—" Think, think. The cold grey eye was on him. "Yes, and a horse-holder from the Hussars."

"I take it they are all in camp. They were none of them part of the big draft."

"That's right, sir."

"Parade them," said the General, "and find out how it was that they were issued by you with six special muskets when they went on duty, but handed in seven when they came off."

"Er—yes, sir."

"And send Colonel Waters here at once."

Colonel Waters was a jovial Welshman. His friends compared him to a chameleon. The things his enemies said of him were unprintable. He was the very able head of Army Intelligence. After three years he found that the Peer could still surprise him.

"I wish I could see why this extra musket, sir— "

"You heard the Quartermaster's report."

"Yes, sir."

"That there were seven muskets, not six—and that one of the guard seems to have missed his turn at sentry altogether."

"I might make more of it, sir," said Waters frankly, "if I had any idea how the guard was arranged."

"It was arranged like everything else in this damned Army," said the General, "too damned slackly. Six men parade in front of my Headquarters at sundown. They're put there to guard it. One of them puts a musket on his shoulder for two hours and walks up and down. He's a guard. At daybreak they stop, and become soldiers again."

"I see, sir," said the Colonel.

Other Generals, in other armies, he might have pointed out, had numerous permanent bodyguards, who wore their own special uniform, and practised ceremonial drill until they did it perfectly. But apparently this General did not want it that way. Nor did

he dress himself in gold braid, plumed hat, and long cloak. Everything simple. Everything utilitarian. A plain blue frock-coat, a short cape, a small cocked hat. A man with a musket outside his door. That was all he wanted. So be it. What was he complaining about?

"—no proper system of reliefs," said the General.

Waters was aware that his attention had wandered.

" You mean," he said, " that at the end of his two-hour stretch the guard walked off to the guard tent and woke the next man? "

" That's so. Leaving the Headquarters of the British Army unguarded for five minutes."

Colonel Waters pursed his lips. It wouldn't have done in the outposts, but Frenada was fifty miles from any known enemy.

" Except," went on the General, " that last night I surmise that it didn't happen that way. Not quite. Just imagine for a moment that you are one of the sentries." Colonel Waters did his best. " You have the turn from midnight to two. At five minutes to two a figure approaches you. You perceive that he is carrying a guard musket. You don't know him personally, but there's nothing odd about that. Most of the other members of the guard are strangers to you. He says, ' Two o'clock. Off you go to bed.' What do you do? "

A faint look of apprehension had come into the Colonel's eye. He was by no means a fool and he was beginning to have an idea where the conversation was going. " I fancy," he said slowly, " that I go off to bed."

" That's what I think, too. And two hours later, at four o'clock, this man goes along and wakes up the next man. Then he stacks his musket in the guard tent—because there's no chance at that hour of returning it to the store from which he filched it on the previous evening. And slips off to his bivouac where he finished the night."

" And the only signs he has left of his intrusion," said Waters slowly, " are one man who hasn't done his guard turn—which, of course, he will keep quiet about unless he is asked—and one extra musket."

" And for two hours he had the run of my Headquarters."

" Was there—was there anything particular, sir, that we should not have liked him to see? "

" On nine nights out of ten—no, on ninety-nine out of a hundred he could have my whole damned correspondence and welcome. No one pays any damned attention to any damned letters I write, anyway. But last night, as it happens, was different. I wrote a letter to Beresford. It might interest you to see it. In the circumstances, I have not dispatched it yet."

He placed on the table a sheet of paper half covered with his own distinctive scrawl.

To Marshal Sir W. Beresford, K.B., Frenada, 24 April.

My dear Beresford,

I have received yours of the 21st. I am very much obliged to you for the drivers and the dismounted cavalry. The former . . .

Waters skipped ahead. There didn't seem to be anything vital . . . *Artificers and pontoneers . . .*

" Try the last paragraph," suggested the General.

Waters read it and tried unsuccessfully to conceal his feelings. The angular, decisive writing announced, *I propose to put the troops in motion in the first days of May. My intention is to make them cross the Douro, in general within the Portuguese frontier, covering the movement of the left by the right of the Army towards the Tormes; which right shall cross the Douro over the pontoons I have had brought up. I then propose to seize Zamora and Toro, which will make all our future operations easy to us.*

Well, there it was, in less than a hundred words, the secret that everyone in both armies wanted to know. The one vital piece of information that would enable the enemy to dispose his superior forces in such a way as to make manœuvre impossible; make stalemate certain; defeat a possibility.

" Since Colonel Gordon went home," said the General—and if he allowed a shade of bitterness to creep into his voice, Colonel Waters could not wonder at it—" I have trusted no one with my intentions. Beresford and Graham had to know first. I was confident of their discretion. No one else was to know anything until they had to."

" I see," said Waters. He was still trying to grapple with the idea, the possibilities of disaster inherent in one extra guard musket.

" If what you fear is true, sir," he said at last, " the possibilities are that it could be an English traitor, or just a busybody who would go to the Opposition press with his news. Or it could be a professional spy."

" It's a good rule to suppose the worst," said the General. " Please assume the latter."

" Very well. Then suppose it really was a Frenchman on duty last night. He must be a Frenchman who speaks perfect English. I know of half a dozen. He must be able to pass himself off as an English soldier—not within the Regiment—that would be very difficult—but in a mixed draft. Of the six men I mentioned not more than two could hope to do that."

"Two?"

"One we need not trouble about. He is in Russia—or dead. The other—yes. There's no denying it. It is right in his line. He's known to have been in Spain lately, and it's got just his touch of inspiration and daring. He's an odd fish. I knew him—oh, twenty-five years ago. François — something or other — Le Duc. We were at Eton together. He was brought up exactly as an English boy. I can only remember this, that in any parcel of scamps he was the maddest.

"He stayed on in England after the war started—professing sympathy for our cause and hatred of Bonaparte. He was of noble family, you see, so it was all quite natural. He even acquired a sort of semi-official standing at Whitehall. And all the time, as we know now, he was passing out a stream of deadly information. It went by fishermen and smugglers direct to Paris. In the truce of 1802 he went over to France—and stayed. He's been there ever since."

"You say that he's been lately in Spain?"

"Yes, sir. Scovell identified him in the Cipher a few months ago. He was tied up in some mischief near Cadiz, where he spent a month as a muleteer in General Graham's camp—and, incidentally, gave away the Tarifa landing."

"Better have Scovell in," said the General.

It took a few minutes to put Major Scovell into possession of the facts. If he was not as alarmed by them as Colonel Waters had been, this was because he had very little tactical knowledge.

"I know about the Le Ducs," he said. "A dangerous pair, I should say."

"Pair?"

"Yes, sir. There are two. Twin brothers, real identical, mirror twins. Edouard the elder, I believe, by a matter of seconds. François is an intelligence agent of the very first class. He crops up frequently in messages. He is—" Scovell referred to his list—"1398 in the cipher. His brother Edouard is a Staff Major in the Army of Andalusia. One of Soult's promising young men. His name may have been mentioned in correspondence but he hasn't been identified yet."

"All right," said the General. "Let us suppose, for a moment, that it was brother François who impersonated the sentry outside my Headquarters last night. He's got what he came for. More than he could have hoped for. What will he do next?"

"Well—" Colonel Waters considered, "assume that he came in under cover of the big draft yesterday. Surely he would stay with it until he reached the front. After that he would take the first opportunity to slip across to the enemy."

"Wouldn't be difficult," said the General. "We're losing men through the outposts every day. Most of 'em from damned carelessness and bad map-reading."

"I suppose we could immobilize the whole draft," suggested Scovell diffidently. "Turn them back to base for a month."

"Four hundred men!" said the General. "And what if we are wrong? It's nothing but surmise."

"You could hardly put four hundred men under guard for a month without giving a reason," agreed Colonel Waters. "And if you don't confine them under guard, what's to prevent this fellow slipping off again?"

"Would you know him if you saw him now?"

"Twenty-five years," said Waters doubtfully. "Even if he isn't disguised. Ten years of campaigning, a coat of bronze, and a pair of whiskers! I doubt if I'd know my own brother after that time."

Silence fell in the Headquarters Office.

"As I said," observed the General at last, "we are in the realms of surmise. Have you any evidence—any recent messages or information, to suggest positively that Le Duc might be contemplating a move like this?"

"We've had very little through in the last few weeks, sir," said Scovell. "This was sent to us this morning by El Torino. I had just finished deciphering it."

He laid on the table a clean sheet of paper on which he had transcribed the message. Under most of the code groups he had been able to pencil the name or word it represented.

The General cast his eye over it.

"Soult getting worried about Hill's position in Estremadura. That's excellent—or rather, it would have been if this damned thing hadn't happened. Soult rejects the suggestion of Jourdan that he should detach a Division and send it forthwith to strengthen the Army of the Centre. Damned odd sort of organization where a junior General can reject the suggestion of his immediate superior! He suggests that 3004—oh yes, I see, that's Suchet—should detach a brigade to help *him* in Andalusia. He concludes by recommending the bearer, 8931, to King Joseph's good wishes. I shouldn't think he'd have much of a reception carrying an insubordinate message like this—by God!"

The last exclamation was unconnected with what had gone before. The General was staring at the message. The two men looked at him.

"I wonder," he said at last. "It's worth a shot."

The two men continued to stare in bewilderment.

The General, on the contrary, for the first time that morning,

seemed almost happy. A matter which before had been incalculable had been reduced, by one word, into the realms of calculation. The problem had become one of time and space, and the General was an acknowledged expert at such problems.

"All these French officers carry personal jewellery, don't they?" he said.

"Many of them," agreed Waters cautiously.

"Edouard was the eldest, you say? If there was any special piece of family jewellery—an heirloom—a signet-ring—he would be likely to have it?"

"I expect so, sir," said Waters, with a despairing glance at Scovell.

"Hmm. How long will it take the draft that left this morning to reach the Coa?"

"Three stages, sir."

"How far off is El Torino?"

"The message got here in a day, sir," said Scovell.

"Yes. Then it can get back in half a day, if the rider is prepared to kill his horse."

"The rider would have to find El Torino," said Waters. "That might take time for an inexperienced man. A guerrilla leader does not leave a forwarding address."

"It will not be an inexperienced man," said the General. "For you are going yourself, Colonel. And here are my instructions—no, requests—to El Torino."

He started to scribble rapidly.

The draft, decided the young Lieutenant in charge of it, like all drafts, marched shockingly. It was difficult to say who was worst, the Johnny Raws, straight from England, or the Belem Rangers, professional convalescents whom a convenient bout of Guadiana fever kept out of every stiff piece of fighting. There were a few genuine convalescents, like himself. He was on his way back, for the third time, to his beloved Rifle Brigade.

Three sergeants were engaged perpetually in whipping in. By God, they straggled worse than puppies in bracken. But no matter. The three-day march was nearly over. The mid-day halt, which they were enjoying at that moment, or would have been enjoying had it not been for the perpetual necessity of seeing that no one in the draft did something stupid, was the last halt before the dispersal point which they were due to reach that evening.

It was at that moment that two horsemen came in sight. They were picking their way down a rough path beside the road. The Lieutenant thought he recognized the leading horseman. There

was something about the black clothes, the prim carriage, the precise cast of countenance. Yes, indeed. It was El Torino himself. He had seen him too often to be mistaken. The stout man with him was no doubt his chief assistant or principal executioner.

" To what do we owe this honour? " asked the Lieutenant with a grin. He knew enough of the services of the great guerrilla to be rather more than polite.

El Torino reined in his horse.

" I am here to make market," he said, in execrable but understandable English. " We have much good fortune lately. Would your men care to purchase souvenirs? "

" I expect they would," said the Lieutenant curiously. But the word had gone round and the nearest men were already crowding the horses. The eyes of the recruits especially, were bulging.

From one of his saddle-bags El Torino took out a handful of glittering badges, numerals, epaulettes, buttons, and ribbons.

" Come and kill your first Frenchman," he said. " Send to your girl at home the hat-badge of a cuirassier—the buttons of a member of the Imperial Guard—the medals of an officer—take your pick."

The soldiers needed no second bidding. Most had money saved and El Torino was soon doing a brisk trade. Even the older soldiers joined the throng.

" Have you anything for me? " asked the Lieutenant at last, with a smile.

" But certainly," said El Torino. " For you I have reserved a most wonderful and special bargain." He turned to his follower, who unstrapped, with great ceremony, a small pouch which he handed to El Torino.

The crowd gaped up at the solemn man on horseback.

" What is it, sir, d'you think? " whispered one of the sergeants. " A diamond cross from a cathedral? "

" Open up," said the Lieutenant impatiently. " What is it? I won't buy a pig in a poke."

El Torino opened the pouch and extracted the contents. The crowd fell silent, for it was a man's hand, recently severed, but part-withered already, and yellowing.

On the forefinger blazed and winked a great signet-ring, a red stone cut in the form of a cross tilted on its side, surrounded by tiny, flashing brilliants.

" I fear that is beyond my purse," said the Lieutenant shortly. " You'll have to take that back to base, where the real money is."

A soldier was pushing and shouldering his way urgently through

the crowd. A nondescript man with brown face and black hair. He wore the uniform of one of the line Regiments.

" Might I see the ring? " he inquired, as soon as he had reached the front rank.

With a short laugh El Torino tossed it, hand and all, to the soldier, who caught it expertly and turned it over. He seemed to fondle the hand as much as the ring.

" I will buy," he said, " if you will name your price."

El Torino looked down at him. " To you, little man," he said, " ten francs."

" *Francs?* " The soldier threw his head back like a boxer who meets an unexpected blow.

The Lieutenant found something in the scene puzzling. Suddenly he stiffened to attention and saluted. A very gorgeous Colonel was standing at his elbow. He had no idea where he had come from.

" Detail six of your men," said Colonel Waters, " under a sergeant, to form an escort. That soldier "—he pointed to the man who was turning the severed hand, over and over, blindly, in his own—" comes back with me to Frenada."

" The Peer doesn't often explain his effects," agreed Colonel Waters. " But yesterday, being in a particularly handsome frame of mind—he'd just signed half a dozen confirmations of Court Martial proceedings—he did explain to me how it was worked. Quite neat, I thought."

" It was luck," said Scovell. He had a scholar's distaste for luck.

" And what was lucky about it? "

" It was all luck. How could he know that El Torino could get hold of a piece of jewellery similar enough to deceive that—that spy? "

" Don't be so damned stupid," said Waters kindly. " That ring *was* the actual, genuine Le Duc family heirloom. And it was, I regret to say, on the actual hand of brother Edouard."

" More fantastically lucky still, then," said Scovell crossly. " How could he guess that this one messenger, out of all possible officers, should be Edouard Le Duc? "

" He didn't guess. He was told."

" Who by? "

" By you," said Colonel Waters.

He got to his feet and looked out into the square, where he could see the General, taking his constitutional. He was walking briskly up and down the cobbled street beside Mr. Larpent, the newly arrived Judge Advocate.

"That's the trouble with you specialists," continued the Colonel. "You've got your noses so close to the grindstone that you can't see the obvious. François was 1398 in your code. You said so yourself. Edouard was his twin—his mirror twin. Of course he had to be 8931, and that made him the messenger."

At that moment Mr. Larpent must have said something which amused the General. The dapper figure halted, the head went back, the famous nose cocked, the great high-pitched laugh screamed out.

Bats flew indignantly from the dome of the Church; the very cross seemed to shudder at that outrageous mirth.

★ ★ ★

CHANGE PARTNERS!

It's woman's privilege to change her mind, and these ladies have certainly used it! For them first love was certainly not last love—they would try anything at least twice, and some of them rather more often. Allow yourself one point for recognizing the lady, and one point each for the source and the author, making a possible total of twenty-four. The answers are on page 92.

1. *This queenly change of fancy was only a temporary "translation"—but who could say nay to that sleek smooth head, those fair large ears!*

2. *She left a man of property for one who designed it, so her husband took a spot of French for consolation.*

3. *This widow's second campaign, against a military objective, had fortifications, maps, and wounds well to the fore, but she was defeated, nevertheless.*

4. *A merry, gap-toothed wife, with enough partners for a Paul Jones, five times she danced to the chirche-dore.*

5. *With her new husband by her side, this lady was glimpsed through the window by her former one, a castaway in more senses than one.*

6. *It took more than death to part the double-barrelled lady of Bay View and her two husbands—there's ghostly it is!*

7. *Quite a country dance for this simple dairymaid, between her lover and her husband, but it ended, alas, on the gallows.*

8. *This modest lady's next-door wooer said it with vegetables and eccentric declarations.*

LAWNS OF SUMMER

A clear green fountain leapt up behind the mower

by RAY BRADBURY

THAT first sound of summer was more important than singing birds or the rustle of leaves; that unmistakable sound of rotating metal, the lawn-mower progressing north, south, east, and west across the green garden below. Grandfather Bigelowe would lie at his ease in the mornings, waiting for summer really to begin. And it began on a day like today when his son's son wheeled out the machine, rolled up the sleeves on his nicely muscled arms, and cut the consecutively smaller quadrangles in the clover, in the dandelions, in the sweet summer grass.

Clover blossoms, bright yellow dandelion heads, ants, sticks, pebbles, remnants of last year's Fourth-of-July squibs and punks, bits of paper, but predominantly clear green, a fountain leapt up behind the chattering mower. A cool soft fountain; Grandpa could imagine it tickling his legs, spraying his warm face, filling his nostrils with the timeless scent of a new season begun, with the promise that yes, we'll *all* live another twelve months.

"God bless the lawn-mower," he said half aloud, listening. "Harbinger of the New Year. Who was the fool who made the first of January New Year's Day? No, they should set a man to watch the grasses across a million Illinois, Ohio, and Iowa lawns, and on that morning when it is long enough for cutting, instead of rattles and horns and yelling, there should be a great swelling symphony of lawn-mowers reaping fresh grass upon the prairie lands. Instead of confetti and streamers, people should throw grass spray at each other on the one day each year that really represents the Beginning!"

He chuckled at his own lengthy discussion of the affair, noted the time, nine o'clock, and rose with the familiar motions of a pantomimist who has been acting the same role for eighty-two years. He went to the window and leaned out into the mellow sunshine. "Hullo, Tom!"

"Morning, Grandpa!" Tom waved, but kept the lawn-mower feeding on its course.

Already, a third of the vast lawn was neatly trimmed, and the sharp chlorophyllous odour coursed upward on the breeze.

" Give 'em hell, Tom! " cried Grandpa heartily, and was soon downstairs eating Grandma's breakfast, with the bay window open so the rattling buzz of the lawn-mower reached him as he ate.

" It gives you confidence," he said.

" What does? " said Grandma.

" That you'll live through to winter, the lawn-mower," he said. " Every autumn when the leaves fall off the trees, my pulse falls off; when the air chills, my blood chills, when the world dies, I always think, ' I'll die, too; can't stay on until spring.' And there we are, the world white, my hair white, all winter long, both of us doubting if we can struggle through to April, and both of us darned happy when Tom gets out the machine and oils it."

" Won't be using the lawn-mower much longer," said Grandma, bringing in a stack of wheatcakes.

" Eh? " said Grandpa, not really listening.

" They got a new kind of grass Tom's putting in this morning, *never* needs cutting," said Grandma. " Don't know what they call it, but it just grows so long and no longer."

Grandpa put down his fork and stared at the woman. " You're finding a poor way to joke with me, I must say."

" Well, go and look for yourself. Land's sake! " said Grandma. " The new grass is waiting in little trays by the side of the house. You just dig small holes here and there and put the new grass in spots. By the end of a year or so the new grass kills off the old grass, and you can sell your lawn-mower."

Grandpa was up from his chair, through the hall, and out of the front door, calling Tom, in ten seconds.

Tom left his machine and came over, smiling, squinting in the sun. " Sure, it's true. Bought the grass yesterday."

" Why wasn't I consulted about this? It's my lawn! " cried Grandfather, his jaw firm.

" Thought you'd appreciate it, Grandpa."

" Well, I don't appreciate and don't like it. Let's see this confounded grass of yours."

They went and stood by the little square pads of new grass.

Grandpa toed at it with the end of his shoe, suspiciously. " Looks like plain old grass to me," he snorted.

" That's right."

" Are you sure some horse-trader didn't catch you early in the morning, when you weren't fully awake? "

" I've seen the stuff grow," said Tom. " Only so high and no higher. Boy, it'll save me getting out here next year, once a week, to keep the darned stuff trimmed."

"That's the trouble with your generation," said Grandpa. "All the things in life that were put here to savour, you eliminate. Save time, save work, you say." He nudged the grass trays disrespectfully.

"Tom, when you're my age, you'll find out it's the little savours and little things in life that count more than the big things. A walk on a spring morning is better than an eighty-mile ride in a speeding car. Do you know why? Because it's full of flavours, full of little things growing. You have time to seek out and find. But that'll come later for you, it's the broad effect you're after now, son, and that's fit and proper. Later you'll fall back on the little things like wanting the grass to grow, feeling good when there are those cursed dandelions to pull. You can't take all the little jobs out of life. You young ones don't leave yourselves anything to *do*. So you *make up* things to do, instead of letting nature show you the way."

Tom was smiling softly at him.

"I know," said Grandpa. "I talk too much."

"Go right ahead," said Tom. "There's no one I'd rather hear."

"Lilacs on a bush are better than orchids," said Grandfather. "And dandelions are *even better*, because they become the substance of a working, active life, and never forget it. Besides, a dish of dandelion greens is good eating once in a while."

"How many years since you had dandelion greens for supper, Grandpa?"

"That has nothing to do with it! Listen here, now." He bent and looked at the new grass closer, fingering it. "Will this kill off the clover and dandelions, too?"

"Yes, sir, it will."

"How much did this stuff cost you?"

"A dollar a tray; I bought ten trays."

Grandpa reached into his pocket, took out his old deep-mouthed purse, unclasped the silver clasp, and removed from it a twenty-dollar bill.

"Tom, you've just made a great profit of ten dollars on this transaction. I want you to deliver this load of unromantic grass into the ravine, the rubbish heap, anywhere, but I ask you, in a civil and humble voice, not to plant it in my garden. Your motives are above reproach, but my motives, I feel, because I am approaching my tenderest years, must be considered first."

"Yes, sir." Tom pocketed the bill, seriously.

"Tom, you can put in this new grass some year soon. The day after I pass on, Tom, you can come out and tear up this whole lawn. Think you can wait another five years or so for an old orator to kick off?"

"I know darn well I can wait." Tom slapped him lightly on the arm.

"There's a thing about the lawn-mower, I can't even tell you, but to me it's the most beautiful sound in the world, the freshest sound of the season, the sound of summer, and I'd miss it fearfully if it wasn't there, and I'd miss the smell of cut grass."

Tom bent to pick up a flat. "Onto the rubbish heap this goes, sir, right now."

"You're a good, understanding boy."

Grandpa went back in, quietly, to finish breakfast.

The day passed, evening came on, Grandpa retired early after reading a little Whittier, and slept well on through the night. When he awoke in the morning the sun was streaming through the windows, bright and fresh. He lay in bed again and was startled to hear the old, the familiar, the memorable sound.

"Why," he said, "Tom's using the lawn-mower this morning! But he used it only yesterday!"

He listened to be sure. And yes, there it was, the endless, droning chatter, up and down, up and down.

He leaned out of the window and called, "Tom, you're cutting the lawn *again*!"

Tom looked up and smiled a white smile and waved. "I know, I know!"

And while Grandpa lay in bed for the next five minutes, smiling and at ease, Tom cut the lawn north, then west, then south, and finally, in a great green spray, east.

★ ★ ★

SUBMARINE PEN!

Sir Winston Churchill always uses stylo-style pens and we had a number of these available. Normally there were two in use, one for black ink and one for red, but during his term as First Lord of the Admiralty the number was increased by the addition of a green one—"Must have port and starboard," he said. For any correspondence which he did by hand and for signing letters, etc., he used the black one, but the red and green appeared gaily—and sometimes fearfully!—in the form of comments on Departmental documents, corrections, etc.

MARY THOMPSON, *secretary to Churchill*
From Churchill by his Contemporaries,
edited by CHARLES EADE

★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

A NEW KIND OF PINK ELEPHANT

"I expect it will turn out to be some advertising stunt," she said

by JOHN WYNDHAM

WHEN I called round that evening I showed Sally the paragraph in the *Westwich Evening News.*

She read it, standing, and with an impatient frown on her pretty face. "I don't believe it," she said, finally.

Sally's principles of belief and disbelief are far too involved for a mere male to follow. How a girl can dismiss solid evidence as though it were a soap bubble, and then go and fall for some phoney advertisement, I just don't know. But it keeps on happening, all the same. This particular paragraph read:

MUSIC WITH A KICK

Patrons of last night's Adams Hall Concert received a shock when a pair of legs dangling knee-deep from the ceiling appeared during one of the items. The whole audience saw them, and all reports agree that they were bare legs, with some kind of sandals on the feet. They remained visible for three or four minutes, during which time they moved back and forth across the ceiling. Then after some movement like kicking, they vanished upward. Examination of the roof shows no traces, and the owners of the Hall are at a loss to account for the phenomenon.

"It's just one more thing," I said.

"What does it prove, anyway?" said Sally, apparently forgetful that she was not believing it.

"I don't know that—yet," I admitted.

"Well, there you are, then," she said.

Sometimes I get the feeling that Sally has no real respect for logic.

It had already begun to look to me as if there were things happening that ought, logically, to be added together to make something.

The first man to bump up against it—the first I can find on record, that is—was Constable Walsh. It may be that others before him saw things, and just put them down as a new kind of

pink elephant; but Constable Walsh's abstemious idea of "one for the road" was a nice cuppa strong tea with several lumps of sugar, so when he came across a head sitting up on the pavement on what there was of its neck, he stopped to look at it pretty hard. The thing that really upset him, according to the report he made when he had run half a mile back to the station and stopped gibbering, was that it had turned and looked back at him.

It's not good to find a head on the pavement at any time, and 2 a.m. somehow makes it worse, but as for the rest, well, you can get a reproachful look from a cod on a slab if your mind happens to be on something else. Constable Walsh did not stop there, however. *He* reported that the thing opened its mouth "as if it was about to address a remark to him."

If it had, he should not have mentioned it; it just naturally brought the pink elephants to mind. However, he stuck to it, so after they had examined him and taken disappointing sniffs at his breath, they sent him back with a witness to show just where he had found the thing. Of course, there wasn't any head, or any blood, or any signs of cleaning up. And that's about all there was to the incident—save a few curt remarks on his conduct sheet to dog Constable Walsh's future career.

But the Constable hadn't a big lead. Two evenings later a block of flats was curdled by searing shrieks from a Miss Farrell who lived in No. 35. When the neighbours arrived, Miss Farrell was hysterical about an arm and shoulder that had emerged from under her bed. But there was nothing to be seen, and nothing more than a discreditable amount of dust to be found under Miss Farrell's bed.

And there were a number of other incidents, too.

It was Jimmy Lindlen who works, if that isn't too strong a word for it, in the office next to mine who drew my attention to them in the first place. Jimmy collects facts. His definition of a fact is anything that gets printed in a newspaper—poor fellow. He doesn't mind a lot what subjects his facts cover as long as they look queer. I suspect that he once heard that the truth is never simple, and deduced from that that everything that's not simple must be true.

I was used to him coming into my room, full of inspiration, and didn't take much account of it. So when he brought in his first batch of cuttings about Constable Walsh and the rest, I didn't ignite much.

But a few days later he was back with some more, so I gave it a little more attention than usual.

"You see. Arms, heads, legs, torsos, all over the place! It's

an epidemic. There's something behind it. *Something's happening!* " he said, as near as one can vocalize italics.

When I had read a few of them I had to admit that this time he had got hold of something where the vein of queerness was pretty constant.

A woman hanging out of a window, watching the street, saw another head below her doing the same, but this one was projecting out of the solid brickwork. Then there was a pair of hands that had risen out of the floor of a butcher's shop and seemed to grope for something; after a minute or two they had withdrawn into the solid cement without trace—unless one were to count some detriment to the butcher's trade.

There was the steeplejack who had become aware of a strangely dressed figure standing close to him, but supported by empty air —after which he had to be helped down and sent home.

While I skimmed through these and some others Jimmy stood waiting, like a soda siphon. I didn't have to say more than " H'm."

" You see," he said, " something *is* happening."

" Supposing it is," I conceded cautiously, " then what is it? "

" The manifestation zone is limited," Jimmy told me, impressively, and produced a town plan. " If you look where I've marked the incidents you'll see that they're grouped. Somewhere in that circle is ' the focus of disturbance.' " This time he managed to vocalize the inverted commas, and waited for me to register amazement.

" So? " I said. " Disturbance of just what? "

He dodged that one. " I've a pretty good idea now of the cause," he told me, weightily.

That was normal, though it might be a different idea an hour later.

" I'll buy it," I offered.

" Teleportation! " he announced. " That's what it is. Bound to come sooner or later. Now someone's on to it."

" H'm," I said.

" But it *must* be." He leaned forward earnestly. " How else d'you account for it? "

" Well, if there could be teleportation, or teleportage, or whatever it is, surely there would have to be a transmitter, and some sort of reassembly station," I pointed out. " You couldn't expect a person or object to be kind of broadcast and then to come together again any old place."

" But you don't *know* that," he said. " Besides, that's part of what I was meaning by ' focus.' The transmitter is somewhere else, but focused on that area."

"If it is," I said, "he seems to have got his levels and positions all haywire. I wonder just what happens to a fellow who gets himself reassembled half in and half out of a brick wall?"

It's details like that that make Jimmy impatient.

"Obviously, it's early stages. Experimental," he said.

It still seemed to me uncomfortable for the subject, early stages or not.

That evening was the first time I mentioned it to Sally and, on the whole, it was a mistake. After making it quite clear that she didn't believe it, she went on to say that if it was true it was probably just another invention.

"What do you mean, 'just another invention?' Why, it'd be revolutionary!" I told her.

Sally was in one of her withering moods. She turned on her disillusioned voice: "We've got two ways of using inventions," she said. "One is to kill more people more easily: the other is to enable quick-turnover spivs to make easy money out of suckers. Maybe there are a few exceptions like X-rays, but not many. Inventions! What we do with the product of genius is first of all ram it down to the lowest common denominator and then multiply it by the vulgarest possible fraction. What a world! When I think what other centuries are going to say about ours, it makes me go hot all over."

"I shouldn't worry. You won't be hearing them," I said.

The withering eye was on me.

"You're a funny girl," I told her. "I mean, the way you think may be crazy, but you do do it, in your own way. Now most girls' futures are all cloud-cuckoo beyond next season's hat or next year's baby. Outside of that it might be going to snow split atoms for all they care—they've got a comforting feeling deep down that nothing's ever changed much, or ever will."

"A lot you know about what most girls think," said Sally.

"That's what I was meaning. How could I?" I said.

She seemed to have set her mind so firmly against the whole business that I dropped it for the evening.

A couple of days later Jimmy looked into my room again.

"He's laid off," he said.

"Who's laid off what?"

"This teleporting fellow. Not a report later than Tuesday. Maybe he knows somebody's on to him."

"Well, are you?"

He frowned.

"I've started. I took the bearings on the map of all the incidents, and the pinpoint came on All Saints Church. I had a

look all over the place, but I didn't find anything. Still, I must be close—why else'd he stop?"

I couldn't tell him that. Nor could anyone else. But that very evening there was a paragraph about an elbow and a leg that some woman had watched travel along her kitchen wall. I showed it to Sally.

"I expect it will turn out to be some advertising stunt," she said.

"A kind of secret advertising?" I suggested. Then, seeing the withering look working up again: "How about going to the pictures?" I asked.

It was overcast when we went in; when we came out it was raining hard. Seeing that there was less than half a mile to her place and all the buses were full up, we decided to walk. Sally pulled on the hood of her mackintosh, put her arm in mine, and we set out through the rain.

For a bit, we didn't talk. Then: "Darling," I said, "I know, that I can be regarded as a frivolous person with low ethical standards, but has it ever occurred to you what a field there is there for reform?"

"Yes," she said, decisively, but not in the right tone.

"What I mean is," I told her patiently, "if you happened to be looking for a good work to devote your life to, what could be better than a reclamation job on such a character. The scope is tremendous, just—"

"Is this a proposal of some kind?" Sally inquired.

"*Some* kind! I'd have you know, darling—Good heavens!" I broke off.

We were in Credit Street. A short street, as might be expected, rainswept now, and empty, except for ourselves. What stopped me was the sudden appearance of some kind of vehicle, farther along. I couldn't make it out very clearly on account of the rain, but I had the impression of a small, low-built lorry with several figures in light clothes on it driving across Credit Street quickly, and vanishing. That wouldn't have been so bad if there were any street crossing Credit Street, but there isn't; it had just come out of one side and gone into the other.

"Did you see what I saw?" I asked.

"But how on earth—?" she began.

We walked a little farther until we came to the place where the thing had crossed. We looked at the solid brick wall on one side and the house-fronts on the other.

"You must have been mistaken," said Sally.

"Well,—*I* must have been mistaken!"

"But it just couldn't have happened, could it?"

" Now, listen, darling—" I began.

At that moment a girl stepped out from the solid brickwork about ten feet ahead of us. We stopped, and gaped at her.

I don't know whether her hair would be her own, art and science together can do so much for a girl, but the way she was wearing it, it was like a great golden chrysanthemum a good foot and a half across, and with a red flower set in it a little left of centre. It looked sort of top-heavy. She was dressed in a kind of brief pink tunic, silk perhaps, and more appropriate to one of those cabarets for elderly gentlemen than Credit Street on a filthy wet night. What made it a real shocker was the things that had been achieved by embroidery, I never would have believed that any girl could—oh well, anyway, there she stood, and there we stood . . .

When I say she stood, she certainly did, but somehow she did it about six inches above ground level. She looked at us both, then she stared back at Sally just as hard as Sally was staring at her. It must have been some seconds before any of us moved. The girl opened her mouth as if she were speaking, but no sound came. Then she shook her head, made a farewell gesture, turned, and walked back into the wall.

Sally didn't move. With the rain shining on her mackintosh she looked like a black statue. When she turned so that I could see her face under the hood, it had an expression I had never seen there before. I put my arm round her; she was trembling.

" I'm scared, Jerry," she said.

" No need for that, darling. There's bound to be a simple explanation of some kind," I said, falsely.

" But it's more than that, Jerry. Didn't you see her face? She was exactly like me! "

" She was pretty much like— " I conceded.

" Jerry, she was *exactly* like. I'm—I'm scared."

" Must have been some trick of the light. Anyway, she's gone now," I said.

All the same, Sally was right. That girl was the image of herself. I've wondered about that quite a bit since . . .

Jimmy brought a copy of the morning paper into my room next day. It carried a brief, facetious leader on the number of local citizens who had been seeing things lately.

The following day, after about seventy-five per cent of its readers had written in to describe the funny things they had been seeing, the *Westwich Evening News* dropped the facetious angle. Two days later, the thing had become factional, dividing sharply into what you might call the Classical and Modern camps.

In the latter, schismatic groups argued the claims of teleportage against three-dimensional projection, or some theory of spontaneous molecular assembly: in the former, opinions could be classified as beliefs in a ghostly invasion or in a suddenly acquired visibility of habitually wandering spirits. In the heat of debate it was rapidly becoming difficult to tell who had seen how much of what, and who was enthusiastically bent on improving his case at some expense of fact.

On Saturday, Sally and I met for lunch. Afterwards, we started off in the car for a little place in the hills which seemed to me an ideal spot for a proposal. But at the main crossing in the High Street the man in front jumped on his brakes. So did I, and the man behind me. The one behind him didn't quite. There was an interesting crunch of metal going on on the other side of the crossing, too. I stood up to see what it was all about, and then pulled Sally up beside me.

"Here we go again," I said. "Look!"

Slap in the middle of the crossing was—well, you could scarcely call it a vehicle—it was more like a flat trolley or platform, about a foot off the ground. And when I say off the ground, I mean just that. No wheels or legs. It kind of hung there, from nothing.

Standing on it, dressed in coloured things like long shirts or smocks, were half a dozen men looking interestedly around them. Along the edge of the platform was lettered: PAWLEY'S PEEP-HOLES. One of the men was pointing out All Saints Church to another; the rest were paying more attention to the cars and the people.

The policeman on duty was hanging a goggling face over the edge of his traffic-control box. Then he pulled himself together. He shouted, he blew his whistle, then he shouted again. The men on the platform took no notice at all. The policeman got out of his box and went across the road, looking like a volcano that had seen a nice place to erupt.

"Hey!" he shouted to them.

It didn't worry them, but when he got within a yard or two of them they noticed him, and they nudged one another, and grinned. The policeman's face was purplish, he spoke to them luridly, but they just went on watching him with amused interest. He pulled a truncheon out, went closer and grabbed at a fellow in a yellow shirt—and his hand went right through him.

The policeman stepped back. You could see his nostrils spread, the way a horse's do. Then he made a fine circular sweep at the lot of them. They kept on grinning back at him as his arm went through them.

I take off my hat to that policeman. He didn't run. He stared at them for a moment with a very queer expression on his face, then he turned, and walked deliberately back to his box; just as deliberately he signalled the north-south traffic across. The man ahead of me was ready for it. He drove right at, and through, the platform. It began to move, but I'd have nicked it myself, had it been nickable. Sally, looking back, said that it slid away on a curve and disappeared through the front of the Westwich Bank.

When we got to the spot I'd had in mind, the bad weather made the place look dreary and unpropitious, so we drove about a bit, and then went back to a quiet roadside restaurant just outside Westwich. I was getting the conversation round to the mood where I wanted it, when who should come across to our table but Jimmy.

"Fancy meeting you two!" he said. "Did you hear what happened at the crossing this afternoon? You know, Jerry, this is something bigger than we thought—a whole lot bigger. That platform thing. These people are away ahead of us technically. Do you know what I reckon they are?"

"Martians?" I suggested.

He stared at me, taken aback. "Now, how on earth did *you* guess that?" he said amazedly.

"I sort of saw it had to come," I admitted. "But," I added, "I do have a kind of feeling that Martians wouldn't be labelled 'Pawley's Peepholes.'"

"Oh, were they? Nobody told me that," said Jimmy.

He went away crestfallen, but by breaking in he had wrecked the tender mood I'd been building up.

On Monday morning our typist, Anna, arrived even more scatterated than commonly.

"The most terrible thing happened to me," she told us as soon as she was inside the door. "And did I blush all over!"

"*All* over?" inquired Jimmy, interestedly.

She scorned him.

"There I was in my bath, and when I happened to look up there was a man in a green shirt, standing watching me. Of course, I screamed, at once."

"Of course," agreed Jimmy. "Very proper. And what happened then, or shouldn't we—?"

"He just stood there," said Anna. "Then he sniggered, and walked away *through the wall.* Was I mortified!"

"Very mortifying thing, a snigger," Jimmy agreed.

"What I mean is," she said, "things like that oughtn't to be

allowed. If a man is going to be able to walk through a girl's bathroom wall, where is he going to stop?"

Which seemed a pretty fair question.

The boss arrived just then. I followed him into his room. He wasn't looking happy.

"What the hell's going on in this damned town, Jerry?" he demanded. "Wife comes home yesterday. Finds two incredible girls in the sitting-room. Thinks it's something to do with me. First bust-up in twenty years. In the middle of it, girls vanish," he said, succinctly.

One couldn't do more than make a few sympathetic sounds.

The trouble seemed to come thickest in the district that Jimmy had originally marked out. You *could* meet them elsewhere, but in that area you couldn't help encountering gangs of them, the men in coloured shirts, the girls with their amazing hair-do's and even more amazing decorations on their tunics, sauntering arm-in-arm out of walls, and wandering indifferently through cars and people alike. They'd pause anywhere to point things out to one another and go off into helpless roars of silent laughter.

What tickled them most was when people got angry with them. They'd make signs and faces at the stuffier sort until they got them tearing mad—and the madder, the funnier. They ambled as the mood took them, through shops and banks and offices and homes, without a care for the raging occupants. Everybody started putting up *Keep Out* signs; that amused them a lot, too.

It didn't seem as if you could be free of them anywhere in the central area, though they appeared to be operating on levels that weren't always the same as ours. In some places they did have the look of walking on the ground or floor, but elsewhere they'd be inches above it, and then in some places you'd encounter them moving along as though they were wading through the solid surface. It was very soon clear that they could no more hear us than we could hear them, so that there was no use appealing to them or threatening them in that way, and none of the notices that people put up seemed to do anything but whet their curiosity.

After three days of it there was chaos. In the worst affected parts there just wasn't any privacy any more. At the most intimate moments they were liable to wander through visibly, sniggering or guffawing. It was all very well for the police to announce that there was no danger, that the visitants appeared unable actually to *do* anything, so the best way was to ignore them. There are times and places when giggling bunches of youths and maidens demand more ignore-power than the average person's

got. It could send even a placid fellow like me wild at times, while the women's leagues of this-and-that, and the Watch-Committee-minded were living in a constant state of blown tops.

The news had begun to get about, and that didn't help, either. News collectors of all kinds came streaming in. They overflowed the place. The streets were snaked with leads to movie cameras, television cameras, and microphones, while the press photographers were having the snappy-picture time of their lives, and, being solid, they were almost as much of a nuisance as the visitants themselves.

But we hadn't reached the peak of it yet. Jimmy and I happened to be present at the inception of the next stage. We were on our way to lunch, doing our best to ignore visitants, as instructed, by walking through them. Jimmy was subdued. He had had to give up theories because the facts had largely submerged him.

Just short of the café, we noticed that there was some commotion farther up the High Street, and seemingly it was coming our way, so we waited for it. After a bit it emerged through a tangle of halted cars farther down, and approached at a rate of some six or seven miles an hour. Essentially it was a platform like the one that Sally and I had seen at the crossroads the previous Saturday, but this was a de luxe model.

There were sides to it, glistening with new paint, red, yellow, and blue, enclosing seats set four abreast. Most of the passengers were young, though there was a sprinkling of middle-aged men and women dressed in a soberer version of the same fashions. Behind the first platform followed half a dozen others. We read the lettering on their sides and backs as they went by:

PAWLEY'S PEEP-HOLES ON THE PAST
GREATEST INVENTION OF THE AGE
HISTORY WITHOUT TEARS—FOR £1
SEE HOW GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMA LIVED
Travel in Ye Olde 20th-Century Expresse:
See Living History in Comfort: Quaint Dresses:
Olde Customs. Educational! Learn Primitive Folkways
& Living Conditions. Know your History:
Get Culture: £1 Trip. Visit Romantic 20th Century.
Safety Guaranteed.
! ! BIG MONEY PRIZE ! !
IF YOU IDENTIFY GREAT-GREAT-GRANDAD/MA

Most of the people on the vehicles were turning their heads this way and that in goggle-eyed wonder interspersed with spasms of giggles. Some of the young men waved their arms at us and

produced silent witticisms which sent their companions into inaudible shrieks of laughter. Others leaned back comfortably, bit into large yellow fruits, and munched. They cast occasional glances at the scene, but reserved most of their attention for the ladies whose waists they clasped.

On the last car we read: *Was Great-Great-Grandma as Good as she Made out? See the Things your Family History Never Told You! Spot the Famous before they got Careful—the Real Inside Dope may win you BIG PRIZE!*

As the procession moved away, it left the rest of us looking at one another, kind of stunned. Nobody seemed to have much left to say just then.

The show must have been something in the nature of a grand première, I fancy, for after that you were liable anywhere in the town to come across a platform labelled something like: *History is Culture: Broaden your Mind Today for only £1*: or, *Know the Answers about Your Ancestors*, with full, good-time loads aboard, but I never heard of another regular procession.

In the Council Offices they were tearing what was left of their hair, and putting up notices left, right, and centre about what was not allowed to the "tourists"—and giving them more good laughs—but all the while the thing grew more embarrassing. Those "tourists" who were on foot took to coming close up and peering into your face, and comparing it with some book or piece of paper they were carrying—after which they looked disappointed and annoyed with you, and moved on to someone else. I came to the conclusion there was no prize at all for finding me.

Well, work must be done: we couldn't think of any way of dealing with this astonishing dislocation, so we had to put up with it and carry on. Pretty nearly everybody one met looked either dazed or scowling—except, of course, the "tourists."

I called for Sally one evening about a fortnight after the platform procession. When we came out of the house, there was a ding-dong going on farther down the road. A couple of girls with heads that looked like globes of gilded basketwork were scratching the daylights out of one another. One of the fellows standing by was looking proud of himself, the rest of the party was whooping things on. We went the other way.

"It just isn't like our town any more," said Sally. "Even our homes aren't ours any more. Why can't they all go away and leave us in peace? Oh, blast them, all of them! I hate them!"

But just outside the park we came upon one little chrysanthemum-head sitting on apparently nothing at all, and crying her heart out. Sally softened a little.

"Perhaps they are human, some of them. But what right have they to turn our town into a horrible fun fair?"

We found a bench and sat on it, looking at the sunset. I wanted to get her away out of the place.

"It'd be grand away in the hills now," I said.

"It'd be lovely to be there, Jerry," she sighed.

I took her hand, and she didn't pull it away.

"Sally, darling—" I began.

And then, before I could get any further, two tourists, a man and a girl, had to come along and anchor themselves in front of us. That time I was angry. You might see the platforms almost anywhere, but you did reckon to be free of the walking tourists in the park where there was nothing to interest them, anyway—or should not have been.

These two, however, had found something. It was Sally, and they stood staring at her, unabashed. She took her hand out of mine. They conferred. The man opened a folder he was carrying, and took a piece of paper out of it. They looked at the paper, then at Sally, then back to the paper. It was too much to ignore. I got up and walked through them to see what it was.

There I had a surprise. It was a piece of the *Westwich Evening News*, obviously taken from a very ancient copy indeed. It was badly browned and tattered, and to keep it from falling to bits entirely it had been mounted inside some thin, transparent plastic. I wish I had noticed the date, but naturally enough, I looked where they were looking—and Sally's face looked back at me from a smiling photograph.

She had her arms spread wide, and a baby in the crook of each. I had just time to see the headline: *Twins for Town Councillor's Wife*, when they folded up the paper, and made off along the path, running. I reckoned they would be hot on the trail of one of their damned prizes—and I hoped it would turn round and bite them.

I went back and sat down again beside Sally. That picture certainly had spoilt things—Councillor's Wife! Naturally she wanted to know what I'd seen on the paper, and I had to sharpen up a few lies to cut my way out of that one.

We sat on awhile, feeling gloomy, saying nothing. A platform went by, labelled:

Trouble-Free Culture: Get Educated in Modern Comfort.

We watched it glide away through the railings and the traffic.

"Maybe it's time we moved," I suggested.

"Yes," agreed Sally, dully.

We walked back towards her place. I was still wishing that I had been able to see the date on that paper.

" You wouldn't," I asked her casually, " you wouldn't happen to know any Councillors? "

She looked surprised.

" Well—there's Mr. Falmer," she said, rather doubtfully.

" He'd be a—a youngish man? " I inquired, offhandedly.

" Why, no. He's ever so old—as a matter of fact it's really his wife I know."

" Ah! " I said. " You don't know any of the younger ones? "

" I'm afraid not. Why? "

I put over a line about a situation like this needing young men of ideas.

" Young men of ideas don't have to be Councillors," she remarked, looking at me.

Maybe, as I said, she doesn't go much on logic, but she has her own ways of making a fellow feel better. I'd have felt better still if I had had some ideas, though.

The next day found public indignation right up the scale again. It seems there had been an evening service going on in All Saints Church. The Vicar had ascended his pulpit and was just drawing breath for a brief sermon when a platform labelled: *Was Gt.-Gt.-Grandad One of the Boys?—Our £1 Trip may Show* floated in through the north wall and slid to a stop in front of the lectern. The Vicar stared at it for some seconds in silence, then he crashed his fist down on his reading-desk.

" This," he boomed, " this is *intolerable*! We shall wait until this *object* is removed."

He remained motionless, glaring at it. The congregation glared with him.

The tourists on the platform had an air of waiting for the show to begin. The Vicar maintained his stony glare. When still nothing happened, the tourists began to get bored. The young men tickled the girls, and the girls giggled them on. Several of them began to urge the man at the front of their craft to start off. After a bit, the platform slid away through the south wall.

It was the first point our side had ever scored. The Vicar mopped his brow, cleared his throat, and then extemporized the address of his life, on the subject of " The Cities of the Plain."

But no matter how influential the tops that were blowing, there was still nothing done about it. There were schemes, of course. Jimmy had one of them: it concerned either ultra-high or infra-low frequencies that were going to shudder the projections of the tourists to bits.

Perhaps something along those lines might have been worked out some time, but it was a quicker kind of cure that we were needing; and it is damned difficult to know what you can do

about something which is virtually no more than a three-dimensional movie portrait unless you can think up some way of fouling its transmission. All its functions are going on not where you see it, but in some unknown place where the origin is—so how do you get at it? What you are actually seeing doesn't feel, doesn't eat, doesn't breathe, doesn't sleep . . .

It was while I was considering what it actually *does* that I had my idea. It struck me all of a heap—so simple. I grabbed my hat and took off for the Town Hall.

By this time the daily processions of sizzling citizens, threateners, and cranks had made them pretty cautious about callers there, but I worked through at last to a man who got interested, though doubtful.

" No one's going to like that much," he said.

" No one's meant to like it. But it couldn't be much worse than this—*and* it's likely to do local trade a bit of good, too," I pointed out. He brightened a bit at that.

I pressed on: " After all, the Mayor has his restaurants, and the pubs'll be all for it, too."

" You've got a point there," he admitted. " Very well, we'll put it to them. Come along."

For the whole of three days we worked hard on it. On the fourth, we went into action. Soon after daylight there were gangs out on all the roads fixing barriers at the municipal limits, and when they'd done that they put up big white boards lettered in red:

! ! WESTWICH ! !

THE CITY THAT LOOKS AHEAD

COME AND SEE

It's beyond the Minute: Newer than Tomorrow.

See the Wonder City of the Age. Toll (Non-Residents) 2/6.

The same morning the television permission was revoked, and the national papers carried large display advertisements:

COLOSSAL! UNIQUE! EDUCATIONAL!

WESTWICH

presents the only authentic

FUTURAMIC SPECTACLE

Want to know

What your great-great-grand-daughter will wear?

How your great-great-grandson will look?

Next century's styles?

How customs will change?

COME TO WESTWICH AND SEE FOR YOURSELF!

THE OFFER OF THE AGES—THE FUTURE FOR 2/6.

We reckoned that with the publicity there had been already there'd be no need for more detail than that—though we ran some more specialized advertisements in the picture dailies: *Westwich—Girls! Girls! Girls!!! The Shapes to Come—Saucy Fashions—Cute Ways! Astonishing—Authentic—Uncensored! Glamour Galore for* 2/6.

And so on. We bought enough space to get it mentioned in the news columns in order to help those who like to think they are doing things for sociological, psychological, and other intellectual reasons.

And they came.

There had been quite a few looking in to see the sights before, but now that they learnt it was something worth charging money for, the figures jumped right up—and the more they went up, the gloomier the Council Treasurer became because we hadn't made it five shillings, or even ten.

After a couple of days we had to take over all vacant lots and some fields farther out for car parks, and people were parking far enough away to need a special bus service to bring them in. The streets became so full of crowds stooging around, greeting any of Pawley's platforms or tourists with whistles, jeers, and catcalls, that local citizens simply stayed indoors and did their smouldering there.

The Treasurer began to worry now whether we'd be liable for Entertainments Tax. The list of protests to the Mayor grew longer each day, but he was so busy arranging special convoys of food and beer for his restaurants that he had little time to worry about them. Nevertheless, after a few days of it, I started to wonder whether Pawley wasn't going to see us out, after all. His tourists did not care for it, one could see, and it must have interfered a lot with their prize hunts, but it hadn't cured them of wandering about all over the place, and now we had the addition of thousands of trippers whooping it up into pandemonium for most of the night. Tempers all round were getting short enough for real trouble to break out.

Then, on the sixth night, when several of us were just beginning to wonder whether it might not be wiser to clear out of Westwich for a bit, the first crack showed—a man at the Town Hall rang me up to say he had seen several platforms with empty seats on them.

The next night I went down to one of their regular routes to see for myself. I found a large, well-lubricated crowd already there, exchanging jokes and jostling and shoving, but we hadn't long to wait. Through the front of the Coronation Café, a platform slid out on a slant, with the label: *Charm and Romance*

of 20th Century—15/6, and there were half a dozen empty seats, at that.

The arrival of the platform brought a well-supported cheer, and a shrilling of whistles. The driver remained indifferent as he steered straight through the crowds. His passengers looked less certain of themselves. Some of them did their best to play up; they giggled, made motions of returning slap for slap and grimace for grimace with the crowd, to start with. Possibly it was as well that the tourist girls couldn't hear the things the crowd was shouting to them, but some of the gestures were clear enough. It couldn't have been a lot of fun gliding straight into the men who were making them.

By the time the platform was clear of the crowd and disappearing through the front of the Empire Emporium, pretty well all the tourists had given up pretending that it was; some of them were looking a little sick. By the expression on several of the faces I reckoned that Pawley might be going to have a tough time explaining the cultural aspect to a deputation somewhere.

The next night there were more empty seats than full ones, and someone reported that the price had come down to ten shillings.

The night after that they did not show up at all, and we all had a busy time with the job of returning the half-crowns, and refusing claims for wasted petrol.

And the next night they didn't come, either; or the one after that; so then all we had to do was to pitch into the job of cleaning up Westwich, and the affair was practically over—apart from the longer-term business of living down the reputation the place had been getting lately.

At least, we say it's over. Jimmy, however, maintains that that is probably only the way it looks from here. According to him, all they had to do was to modify out the visibility factor that was causing the trouble, so it's possible that they are still touring around here—and other places.

Well, I suppose he could be right. Perhaps that fellow Pawley, whoever he is, or will be, has a chain of his fun fairs operating all round the world and all through history at this very moment. But we don't know—and, as long as he keeps them out of sight, I don't know that we care a lot, either.

Pawley has been dealt with as far as we are concerned. He was a case for desperate measures; the Vicar of All Saints appreciated that; and undoubtedly he had a point to make when he began his address of thanksgiving with: "Paradoxical, my friends, paradoxical can be the workings of vulgarity . . ."

Once it was settled, I was able to make time to go round and

see Sally again. I found her looking brighter than she'd been for weeks, and lovelier on account of it. She seemed pleased to see me, too. "Hullo, Jerry," she said. "I've just been reading in the paper how you organized the plan for getting rid of them. I think it was wonderful of you."

A little time ago I'd probably have taken that for a cue, but it was no trigger now. I sort of kept on seeing her with her arms full of twins, and wondering in a dead-inside way how they got there.

"There wasn't a lot to it, darling," I told her, modestly. "Anyone else might have hit on the idea."

"That's as may be — but a whole lot of people don't think so. And I'll tell you another thing I heard today. They're going to ask you to stand for the Council, Jerry."

"Me on the Council. That'd be a big laugh—" I began. Then I stopped suddenly. "If—I mean—would that mean I'd be *called* 'Councillor?'" I asked her.

"Why—well, yes, I suppose so," she said, looking puzzled.

Things shimmered a bit.

"Er—Sally, darling—er, sweetheart, there's—er—something I've been trying to get round to saying to you for quite a time . . ." I began.

* * *

STARLING

I saw him first with pearly breast
Quizzing the world upon his nest;
He looked at me with clownish eyes
And wondered with a bird's surmise
If I were friend or threatening foe
Ready to crush him with a blow.
And then he flew above my plot
And balanced on a chimney-pot
Where with an arrogant pretence
He mocked me by my garden fence.
I answered back but he sang on
Until the morning was half gone,
As if he were in that bright air
A thrush or blackbird singing there,
And so became by magic twist
No bird but a ventriloquist.

LEONARD CLARK, *English Morning and other Poems*

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

It wasn't the words
That frightened the birds

Hush! in the canal below
Don't you hear the plash of oars
Underneath the lantern's glow,
And a thrilling voice begins
To the sound of mandolines?—
Begins singing of amore
And delire and dolore—
O the ravishing tenore!

Lady, do you know the tune?
Ah, we all of us have hummed it!
I've an old guitar has thrummed it
Under many a changing moon.
Shall I try it? DO RE MI—
What is this? Ma foi, the fact is,
That my hand is out of practice,
And my poor old fiddle cracked is,
And a man—I let the truth out—
Who's had almost every tooth out,
Cannot sing as once he sung,
When he was young as you are young,
When he was young and lutes were strung
And love-lamps in the casement hung.

W. M. THACKERAY

What Price Love?

The ray of moonlight reaches down to the flagged terrace and there gives rise to a mellow baritone voice: my father's voice, singing *Page, Squire and Captain.* Presently, no doubt, he will change it to:

I think of thee, I see thee, I adore thee,
At every moment, always, everywhere . . .

"The Captain's voice would really grace any theatre," sighs Madame Bruneau.

"If he'd only had a mind to . . ." replies my mother proudly. "He is so talented."

The rays of the rising moon fall at last on the angular silhouette of a man standing on the terrace. One hand, so white that it appears green in the moonlight, grips a bar of the railing. His crutch and stick lean against the wall, discarded. My father rests like a heron upon his one leg and sings.

"Ah!" Madame Bruneau sighs again, "every time I hear the Captain sing, I feel sad. You can have no idea what it means to lead such a life as mine. To grow old beside a husband like my poor husband. To tell myself that I shall die without ever having known love."

"Madame Bruneau," the stirring voice interrupts her, "you know that my offer still holds good?"

In the shadows I know that Madame Bruneau gives a start and I hear the shifting of her feet on the gravel.

"The wicked man! The wicked man! Captain, you will force me to run away!"

"Sixpence and a packet of tobacco," says the placid, beautiful voice, "because it is you. Sixpence and a packet of tobacco as payment for teaching you the meaning of love; d'you really think it excessive? Don't be stingy, Madame Bruneau! When my prices go up, you'll regret the present terms. Sixpence and a packet of tobacco."

COLETTE, *My Mother's House*

Fortissimo

All hail him victor in both gifts of song,
Who sings so loudly, and who sings so long.

ALEXANDER POPE, *The Dunciad*

Drumstruck

I was struck, when I re-entered Sue Borglum's, by a certain demoralization which seemed to have taken place since I left. In the room where people were dancing, a little baldish man with spectacles was playing on a set of tap-drums: he was apparently under the impression that he was contributing to the pleasure of the dancers; but as his drumming made the phonograph inaudible, they were endeavouring to restrain him. He was complacently smiling to himself, and when anyone remonstrated with him, only glanced up and smiled more happily, deafened by his own drums. From time to time he blew a kazoo.

EDMUND WILSON, *I Thought of Daisy*

Heavenly Harmony

Mrs. Bradley, followed by the pianist carrying the 'cello, went to the front of the platform, and observed, in her beautiful voice: " Interlude. *Ave Maria.*"

This seemingly impious observation passed unremarked except by Roger, who suddenly guffawed. The rest of the audience dutifully applauded, and Mrs. Bradley, seating herself, took the 'cello, shot the startled pianist a leer which made him choke, gave the impression that she was feeling the pulse of the instrument and then drew her bow experimentally across the strings.

It was not the worst interpretation ever suffered by Schubert's little sugar-plum, and the audience was pleased with it. Mrs. Bradley, smirking like a satisfied boa-constrictor, applied herself again to her instrument and rendered a Spanish dance. Then, with a bow to the accompanist and a leer at the audience, she resigned the 'cello to the pianist, who carried it off the stage as though it were a large, unwieldy but infinitely impressive bouquet, and retired back-stage and so to the auditorium.

GLADYS MITCHELL,
Here Comes A Chopper

Mandoline

The singers of serenades
Whisper their fated vows
Unto fair listening maids
Under the singing boughs.

Tircis, Aminte, are there,
Clitandre has waited long,
And Damis for many a fair
Tyrant makes many a song.

Their short vests, silken and bright,
Their long pale silken trains,
Their elegance of delight,
Twine soft blue silken chains.

And the mandolines and they,
Faintlier breathing, swoon
Into the rose and grey
Ecstasy of the moon.

PAUL VERLAINE, *Fêtes Galantes,*
translated by Arthur Symons

ON THE BEACH

"Are you the victim this time?" she asked sweetly

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

I DID not see him arrive. From the dunes where I was painting, perhaps I was too absorbed in the sea's slow retreat, and the cautious advance of the coast of Cornwall towards the United States of America. The wide beaches appeared, gleaming with shallow pools. Here and there, jagged rocks pricked through the sand, blue with clinging mussels.

Quite suddenly, though it must have taken an hour or more to build, below me, about thirty yards from the sea-wall, stood the largest sand-castle I had ever seen, and the most elaborate. A house-agent would have described it in flattering terms. Its architect was a youngish man, dark-haired, and wearing white shorts and a blue beach shirt.

He seemed to take no notice of the crowd around him, except that I fancied it made him feel important. He bustled about with two tin spades, one in either hand, patting, cutting, and shaping—towers and battlements, keep and courtyards. I left my easel to go down to the beach and look at the castle more closely. Instead, I found myself concentrating my attention on the man.

I judged that he was something more than thirty. He was lively, even jaunty; assiduous in his work, taking evident pleasure in small successful details, as he completed them. But above all, he was quite lost in what he was doing. It was as though the outside world did not exist. He pushed past onlookers as if they were not there. Sometimes he stood still, biting his lip and resting his chin on one hand, in a dramatic, thoughtful pose.

It was strange, and in a quiet way entertaining, and I pushed nearer in order to observe him. I soon noticed that somebody else was doing the same thing.

He was a tall, elderly man, with neat white hair, and a great air of authority about him. His grey flannel trousers were beautifully pressed, his white shirt well laundered, and he carried a thick stick. He walked two or three times right round the castle, then came and stood directly behind the architect, just as he was indulging in one of his pensive, dramatic pauses. It lasted rather

longer than usual, and at last the older man touched him on the shoulder.

"I say," he said, and his voice was charming, "this castle! Quite an affair! Some rather interesting features about its design, as a matter of fact. I suppose you're not an architect too, by any chance?"

The young man turned round and faced him. He spoke nervously and I saw that his eyes were very wide open and very far apart. "Why, yes," he said. "As a matter of fact, I am. Why?"

The older man raised his eyebrows. "Ah! That explains it! I wanted to know why you shaped that courtyard as you have—the one surrounding the keep?"

He pointed to it with a thin forefinger. Instantly, the other's expression changed. He was another man—alert, fiery, warm, inspired, what you will.

"Space!" he cried. "Space! The use of space! Come over and have a look!"

He walked quickly round to the other side of the castle, talking as he went. "I'm delighted you should have noticed it," he said. "Really I am! After all, what is the great modern city problem? The use of space, the use of small, highly expensive plots of ground to the best advantage, without giving the appearance of crowding. I do it—" and he picked up a spade as a pointer—"by means of an optical illusion."

The older man smiled. "Not entirely original," he commented. "A mathematical solution to an aesthetic problem. It's been done before."

"Maybe—but in exactly this way? I wonder . . ."

He took the old man's arm and knelt down by the moat, dragging him down beside him. Together, they looked over the battlements into the courtyard. I stepped up behind them to hear what they had to say, and caught snatches of their talk as the crowd moved around us, gaping and pushing.

They talked of square-footage and angles and heights, and kept moving on to observe the effect from different places. I followed them.

At the end I heard the old man say: "Would you like to come and see me in London? I might be interested."

Suddenly the other spoke rudely.

"Who are you?" he asked. "I work for a firm that has contracts worth millions, but serves up variations of the neo-classical, even when they design a factory—if you can imagine it! And am I bored! In fact that's why, here on holiday, I get away from myself and do things like this—sand experiments, illus-

trating what could be. I just come down and find myself imagining. I make castles, true, but the mathematics, the design, the conception are all modern. Come down tomorrow, sir, and let me show you how I'd apply this technique to an imaginary lay-out for a city estate—flats and so forth—then, the next day . . ."

He was visibly excited again, full of plans enough to last them for the rest of his holiday. The old man smiled sympathetically, but I sensed criticism in his mind. I felt he was thinking: "To get big contracts, young man, one needs often to curb one's tongue—and you don't yet, good though you are."

He said: "*Neo-classical? Good Lord, no!* Never touch it. Anyway, come and see for yourself in London. Here's my card. Ring me—and don't be put off by my secretary—she protects me! Just say you are the man with the sand-castles and give your name. What is it, by the way?"

"Davidson," said the young man, looking down at the card. I could not see what was written on it, though I craned my neck. It could not decently be done. A moment later, with a wave of the hand, the old man left. Young Mr. Davidson stuffed the card into his pocket without another look, and applied himself to his castle—patting and pushing and cutting, quickly and methodically. He did not seem at all excited by what had just happened to him. His face showed neither joy nor elation. In fact, he began to whistle, flatly and idiotically, a series of little tunes, ending with *Pop goes the Weasel.*

I stayed to watch.

Five minutes later, another man came and spoke to him, an earnest, red-faced citizen, hearty and self-assured. His first assumption seemed to be that he knew everything and was entitled to criticize and be censorious about anything that happened, anywhere. His wife trailed behind him, carrying two baskets, one containing lunch and the other knitting. She reminded me of a coal-tender, behind rather a noisy engine. He puffed up and down and walked round the castle, elbowing other people out of the way.

"Well, well, well!" he kept saying. "Mary, did you ever see such a castle in all your life?"

Mary hadn't.

He wagged his head, jocular, elephantine. "Ah, mark my words, we've got a genius here, a genius—eh, young man, what about it? I'm a builder, and I know what I'm talking about . . ."

He went on in this way for several minutes, his banter getting heavier and heavier, but young Mr. Davidson said absolutely nothing. It was as though he had been struck dumb, except that,

as the newcomer's speeches got longer, his face set in a wicked frown. At last, he sprang to his feet with a shout, as though he could bear the stream of chatter no longer.

" Ah, sir! " he cried. " If you will pardon my saying so, you make me sick. A castle, a castle, a castle, that's all you say, all you think about. Easy for you! But what about me? Here I am, patting away, cutting away, for hours at a time—all for whose amusement? Not mine! "

His voice rose as he spoke, and the newcomer was immensely taken aback by his vehemence.

" D'you think I like doing this, sir? I don't, don't, don't! It ruins my holiday every year. But in spite of it, every year I have to go somewhere where there's a sandy beach. If there's one thing I hate, it's sand-castles! "

By now, the newcomer was backing away from the young man. It was evidently a long time since anyone had told him that he made people feel sick.

" Now, don't get hot under the collar, young man," he kept saying. " What's wrong with you, anyway? Why do what you don't want to do? I never do, do I, Mary? "

" No, Ned, you don't," said Mary with bitter irony. " You don't indeed! "

The young man suddenly relaxed, his shoulders dropped, and he began to speak again with quiet, dramatic despair.

" I'm sorry," he said. " But do you know what I do all my working life? Just guess. You can't? I'm a grocer's assistant! "

Then he fairly spat out the words that followed: " Every damn day of my life, butter and cheese, butter and cheese—cut and snip and pack and fold—butter and cheese! And those damn butter-patters—all day long, all day long! They drive me mad! "

He took the two spades and began cutting and patting and shaping a new tower of sand, miming himself at work on a huge mountain of butter, behind his counter. His teeth were clenched, his eyes wild.

" And when I come away on holiday," he cried at last, " do I get peace? Do I? I do not! It's all so stuck in my mind, what I do for the rest of the year, for fifty blasted weeks, that I'm down on the beach all day long, doing exactly the same thing —in sand! "

His voice dropped and almost slipped into a sob, as with his two spades, automatically, like a sleep-walker, a day-dreamer, he patted and pushed, shaped and cut his heap of sand.

Very quietly, very stealthily, trying to be unobserved, the rough, hearty gentleman whose name was Ned, stole away.

As soon as he had gone and his wife had ceased looking back at the curious spectacle they had just left, young Mr. Davidson sat up unemotionally and, in a quiet round voice, murmured, "Lord, what a bore!" and strolled gaily round his castle, carrying out running repairs.

I thought I had begun to grasp his game. "What a gorgeous liar," I thought. "What a perfect specimen! And how he enjoys it! How fluently he enters into it! What talent! Two such highly different stories—they cannot both be true!" I wondered if either of them was true.

I went and packed up my easel and painting things. It was impossible, now, to contemplate missing such a strange situation, allied to such a magnificent performance, but I had to look after my property.

When I returned, there were two old ladies talking to him—two of those delicate, formal, rather infirm old souls of the kind met at hydros and watering-places, full of good works and with an inexhaustible interest in lace, beadwork, and light chit-chat about current events.

"Yes, yes," one was saying. "My sister Maud and I were saying—weren't we, Maud?—what a really splendid castle you had made! We felt we simply had to speak to you about it. I told my sister Maud—didn't I, Maud dear?—I said: 'Really, I never saw a sand-castle like it! Quite medieval, if you know what I mean—moat, battlements, keep, and all—charming, charming!'"

I must say here and now that for the next few minutes, young Mr. Davidson was quite delightful. He was gallant, he was polite, he was kind. Perhaps, I felt, he knew by now that I was listening to him, dwelling on his words. This time he was grand, dramatic, and spoke gravely—like an actor-manager of the old school, on a seaside holiday.

He bowed. "Delighted," he said. "Delighted to give you pleasure, madam, believe me."

I moved nearer to him now, quite shamelessly, anxious not to miss a word.

"You may wonder why, at my age, I make sand-castles, madam? I shall tell you." He paused, as though about to reveal something huge, something significant. The two old ladies exchanged nods and becks, like two mechanical dolls.

"I am a journalist, ladies," he announced gravely. "I shall not reveal to you the name of my paper. You would be shocked. Your delicate natures would shun me. The stories I write—murder, sex, and sin, for eleven months of the year. I! Who was nurtured on the dreams of the world's master spirits—Hans Andersen, Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, Shakespeare!"

If it had not been for his eloquence and conviction, which suddenly became golden, sublime, I would have dismissed him for overplaying; but he began to put up, just when he needed it most, an act such as I have never seen, before or since.

"What am I doing here, ladies?" he cried. "Here, on the beach of childhood, surrounded by childhood's golden dreams, I am on holiday! On holiday from the cruel, stale, bestial world which demands to be reported on its own terms in the Sunday papers—no magic, no wonder, no sunrise, no dreams—only murder, sex, and sin! This castle, ladies, is the castle of illusion. It is the meeting-place of the parliament of childhood.

"You see that turret, the big one on the left? From the little window I have hollowed out near the top, every evening Rapunzel lets down her hair. From the postern, with its driftwood drawbridge, the little goose-girl emerges every day at dawn with her milk-white charges, and leads them to graze in green orchards beyond the invisible hills. And the keep? Ah, the keep is Titania's Palace. I have decorated it with a green seaweed pennant, fit for a queen of earth and air and water. There at the back is the wall—the very wall—to which Bottom applied his eye, there the courtyard where poor Lear raved! And down that stairway once ran Cinderella—it was on that step, ladies, the second from the bottom, note, that she left her glass slipper."

In his wild enthusiasm, he seized one of the old ladies by the hand, and almost dragged her to the other side of the castle, where there was a beautiful seaweed forest, laid out trimly yet nobly, as though by another Capability Brown.

"And here, madam," he cried, "may I present you? Birnam Wood! Come only this morning, I assure you, from the far side of the beach—from Dunsinane!"

He was mad, gloriously mad, I reflected, and watched the two old ladies disentangle themselves feebly, as best they could, from the toils of his personality, and the torrent of words which poured from him. At last he let them go, bowing to them dramatically as they walked away, looking round from time to time.

I heard the first one say to her companion: "Well, my dear Maud, a most extraordinary young man, I must say. Most interesting!"

It was at this moment that I, who by now was surely familiar to him, stepped in. I said very quietly, laughing a little: "I say, your castle! It's creating quite a sensation!"

Ignoring majestically the fact that I must have heard all his other stories, he switched immediately into the one destined personally for me! It seemed specially brilliant.

" Sh-h-h! " he hissed, putting a finger to his lips. " Not a sound! Careful, please! "

I assured him that I had no immediate intention of yelling, or even of talking in a careless manner, and he continued: " It's my wife," he said, taking me by the arm and speaking in a low, confidential voice. " You just don't know what a terrible thing it is—terrible! " There was real tragedy in his accents, I felt, this time, in spite of the considerable evidence I had of his histrionic abilities—in fact of his great capacity for sheer untruth. He sounded perfectly sincere.

" What is terrible? " I asked.

He looked over his shoulder towards a woman, sitting with her back to us, facing the sun, in a deck-chair.

" You must think me quite crazy," he said, looking for the first time that afternoon perfectly normal, " behaving as I did." He spoke with disarming candour.

" My wife is a tragic person," he said. " She should have had a large family, but for some reason she couldn't have a child. And you know how these things are?—I'm sorry to talk to you like this, but you've been watching, I know, and listening—well, one day, something broke in her mind. She went mad, I suppose you'd say. And now, all the year, she's shut away, but on my holiday I always bring her here, poor darling . . ."

He paused for a moment, then continued. " And the castle? Well, you see, the thing is, she believes we have six children—two girls and four boys, to be precise—and this castle is what I build, every day, for them. But I get bored with the true explanation—hence the tales I tell to passers-by."

He looked sheepish, and I felt terribly sorry for him. The woman with her back to us in the deck-chair never stirred.

" She sits all day and knits," he said. " But there are one or two things I have to do as well as make castles. May I ask you a favour? I know it sounds odd, but can you eat ice-cream? I mean two or three at a sitting? You see, several times a day I have to go to the stall and buy ice-cream for our children. Then I have to eat the stuff! I can't bear it. Could you manage, say, three of them? I'll only get sixpennies."

" Why, yes," I said, touched by this new, small misfortune. " I'll manage three, of course! "

" Will you? " He was delighted. " Now that is kind of you, it really is! I'll run off and get them. You just stay here. She won't take any notice of you, I don't expect. If she does, just say I've gone to get ices for the kids. I'll take the spades with me and put them in the car—I've had enough of sand-castles for the day, I think."

He walked briskly towards the gap in the sea-wall, and when he reached it, he turned and waved a hand to me, and I waved back. As he disappeared, the woman in the deck-chair looked round and smiled at me. She was an exceedingly handsome woman, in late middle age, with a tremendous twinkle in her eye.

" Hullo," she said, sweetly. " Are you the victim this time? "

I stammered yes, or no—I forget exactly which.

" Tell me," she said. " You have been hearing some rather grim stories about me, haven't you? What has he been telling you this time, as a matter of interest? Was it the children that I couldn't have? And did I go a bit queer and have to be locked up? It was that one, wasn't it? "

I stammered something again, trying to hedge, but she looked at me humorously. " Look," she said, " I'm awfully sorry, but I wish you'd relax and accept that I'm speaking the truth. About the children, it's not really surprising we haven't any. After all, I am his mother, and I am nearly sixty, both of which seem to me to be almost insuperable obstacles! "

I suppose I gasped and looked confused, and she laughed too, for the first time rather bitterly: " Oh, don't think I'm hard-hearted," she said. " Poor Jack! Nobody knows how it happened, except that ever since childhood he has always had the wildest imagination. Not that we were surprised, really. So many of his relations on my side were pretty fantastic—writers and so forth. We encouraged him, my husband and I, but somehow, at some time, we don't know when, something in him stopped working and he remained permanently outside the normal real world—the world of fact, I mean. His lies and exaggerations became, for him, reality. You couldn't trust him to do anything, certainly not to take a message. He'd invent everything! That was over twenty years ago, and he has got worse since. He's perfectly safe, completely irresponsible, and, at times, quite delightful. It's tragic, because there is much in him of a fine man, much even of a brilliant man . . ."

I felt sorrier than ever for them both now, and said so.

" Thanks," she said, " but don't bother too much. As far as we know, he's quite happy. It is I who feel sad sometimes. I wonder how much of it was my fault. Ought I to have noticed it sooner? Could I have? I don't know."

She was silent for a moment, then looked up quickly: " By the way," she said, " what's he up to now? The ice-cream for ' the children? ' Forgive me if I go and join him for a second, because he loves children dearly, being one himself still, poor chap. Sometimes he spends as much as a pound on ices, for every kid in sight. I'll take my deck-chair with me and pop it in

the car, then we'll come back—and perhaps you'd like to have supper with us? He's good company still. Don't worry about the ice-creams. In ten minutes, he'll have forgotten he ever mentioned them to you."

I helped her fold her chair and offered to carry it for her, but she forbade me.

"It wouldn't do for us to come up together," she said. "It'd make him suspect that I'd been telling you the truth about him, and that's the one thing he can't bear. I'll say to him: 'I've met such a nice man down on the beach. Let's invite him to dinner'—and he'll say yes at once."

She smiled again, her charming, understanding, slow smile, and walked away towards the gap in the sea-wall, behind which stood the ice-cream carts. As her son had done, she turned and waved to me. "Good-bye!" she cried, "Good-bye!"

I looked at the sand-castle for a few minutes, alone. The crowd had thinned out on the beach, with the waning sun. It was getting cold and I was lightly dressed. I waited five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, but neither of them came back. At last, I went to the sea-wall to get news of them from the ice-cream man.

"Why, yes, sir," he said. "They went back to The Beachcroft in the car, about twenty minutes ago. Nice chap, Mr. Davidson. Know him well? He's not half a story-teller!"

For a moment, I stood undecided, then, wishing the man good night, I turned and started quickly up the cliff path towards The Beachcroft Hotel. I had to find the answer. Suddenly, I felt certain that for some hidden, ridiculous reason, they were both lying! If so, it was a game that more than two could play . . .

With two glasses of beer in front of them, they were sitting, smoking, by the window in the bar, and looking out over the sea. As I came in, they exchanged glances and smiled. There was no question about it—after seeing them laugh together—they were mother and son. I walked towards them, wondering how I would make out in conversation. They had great talent between them. Young Mr. Davidson rose as I approached.

"You left me," I said with feigned bitterness, "both of you! Right in the air! I take that very hard."

"Sit down," said young Mr. Davidson. "Let me get you a glass of beer, Mr. . . .?"

"Pinner," I said. "John Pinner." It was not my real name.

He came back from the bar and set the glass down in front of me, then held out his hand to his mother for the money. She gave it to him, with a smile

"Tell me, Mr. Pinner," he said, "are you a good, natural liar, too?"

"Well, yes," I admitted, taken aback at first by the directness of the question, "pretty fair. Forgive me if I hesitate, before—experts!"

They both laughed. "Meaning?" said young Mr. Davidson.

"Meaning that I listened with admiration to both your performances," I said.

"Victims don't, as a rule, follow us home," said his mother. "You're not angry with us, are you?"

I shook my head. "No," I said. "As long as I discover the truth."

"Ah, the truth," she said, laughing to herself, like a very young girl, "the truth! It's childish, of course! For professional storytellers—and we both are—the world is one long busman's holiday. My son and I merely pursue this to its logical conclusion. We even take our annual holiday in fiction. On the beach, we hold competitions between us for what we call the whopper of the day—loser to pay for the evening's drinks!"

"There's no question about who won today," I said, turning to young Mr. Davidson. His mother chuckled. "No," she said amiably. "He got off to a brilliant start with that damned sandcastle of his, didn't he? But I thought my own little answering gambit really quite good, of its kind . . ."

She paused for a moment, looking at me, her eyes bright with amusement. "Mr. Pinner," she said, "why not join us for supper, as I suggested earlier on, down on the beach? I think you deserve it."

I declined, but suggested that we should meet on the following evening, with my wife. Of course, I am a bachelor, but I reckoned that it wouldn't be difficult to find somebody positively baffling as a temporary spouse.

I had decided to have my revenge.

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REVERSE POLICY

Nothing is ever quite organized in Asia. When a political procession is arranged there is invariably a traffic jam or the leaders take the wrong turning by accident and end up in a cul-de-sac. After this, bearing such slogans as *Onward to Freedom*, the whole thing starts moving mysteriously backwards.

AUSTIN COATES, *Invitation to an Eastern Feast*

RING FOR LOVE

For all her charm, she was a minx of the very first order

by LAURENCE KIRK

CURFEW is still rung in one or two English towns. At Sandilow it had been rung regularly on the same bell every night at eight for over five hundred years; and now that Lavender Williams is safely married it is still rung regularly. There have only been four gaps in the whole of that time: one when the French occupied the town in the fifteenth century, one when the plague devastated it in the sixteenth, one in the nineteen-forties when the danger of paratroopers silenced all church bells, and one quite recently when Lavender fell in love.

Sandilow is famous for its old tiled roofs, and the bell is rung at St. Peter's, in the middle of the town, which has the loveliest roof of them all, and also a square tower with an onion-shaped top. There is a special bell for the curfew, quite separate from the carillon of four; and the bell-rope is clearly marked with a grip of red wool to distinguish it from the others, which are all marked with blue.

It has a clear, firm, cheerful note, and it begins the moment that the clock, which is also at St. Peter's, has made the last stroke of eight. From then on, rain or sunshine, winter or summer, for five minutes it rings out its daily message. Nobody quite knows what the message is. It's too slow for a wedding and too fast for a death. But it is a pleasing sound like the night-watchman's "All's well." Some people think of the past when they hear it now, and some of the future.

But it was different two years ago. Curfew began to do some very odd things then, and those in the know used to think of the present as they listened intently.

"Oh dear," they said under their breath. "I'm afraid Lavender's being difficult again."

Curfew-ringing has had its ups and downs as a profession. A penny a day was the pay in the earliest times; and given the price of beer then and the fact that there wasn't any tobacco, that was probably as good a money value as it has produced. And quite apart from the question of money there was prestige and a uni-

form attached to the office then which no longer exist. The uniform was of blue broadcloth with brass buttons, and there is still a portrait in the Guildhall of Mr. Thomas Wragg who rang curfew in the eighteenth century for forty-one years without missing a day.

No one since has ever approached that score and with the rise in the cost of living it has been very difficult at times to get anyone to ring it at all. The penny became a penny halfpenny during the reign of Queen Anne and tuppence when George the Fourth became King. When Victoria ascended the throne there was a long and rowdy meeting of the Town Council and the daily pay became a yearly salary of ten golden sovereigns, but minus the blue broadcloth which was no longer obtainable. That rate continued till after the First World War, when it had to be increased to fifteen pounds a year (paper, not gold any longer) to obtain a candidate.

There was similar and worse trouble after the Second World War. Not only was the pound worth less than ever, but they had to compete with a whole number of distractions which hadn't existed in earlier days. The principal of these were the cinema, radio, television, and summer time. In the old times eight o'clock had marked the end of the day. Now it didn't any longer; and nobody was ready to mess up all his evenings with five minutes of bell-ringing.

This time the controversy went on for weeks. The Council was almost evenly divided between those who wanted their curfew at any price and those who wouldn't go a penny beyond fifteen pounds a year. A deadlock was reached and tempers were beginning to run high when young Nathaniel Wragg, a descendant of the famous Thomas Wragg, suddenly emerged from the Burmese jungle and announced that he would like to have the job of ringing curfew. The Mayor, who was on the point of proposing to raise the pay to twenty-five pounds a year, could hardly believe his ears. He engaged Nathaniel quickly before he could change his mind, and four days later curfew rang out once again at Sandilow. The people smiled when they heard it: they felt they had really come home at last.

Nathaniel had always been a serious-minded young man and the Burmese jungle had done nothing to make him more lighthearted. He smoked ten cigarettes a day, drank one pint of beer, minded his own business which was that of a garage mechanic, avoided the cinema, and never thought of pursuing women. In this rather arid life the nightly curfew-ringing was quite a pleasant oasis. Up in the bell loft, for five minutes a day, he became the hub of the whole universe. It was his one form of self-expression.

No one knew what he thought up there, amongst the bats in the belfry; but he did a lot of thinking, and his thinking began to express itself in his bell-ringing. You can't, of course, do very much, just ringing one bell; but Nathaniel was a sensitive young man for all his stolid appearance, and if you listened carefully, you could at least tell whether he had had a good day at the garage or whether it was going to be another wet Sunday tomorrow.

He had been ringing the bell for three months when Lavender Williams slowly began to intervene in his thoughts. Sandilow was not famous for the beauty of its women, but Lavender was a notable exception. Neat and trim, with violet-blue eyes, she had already turned down half the young men of the town, and was quite ready and even eager to turn down the other half. Charm she certainly had, but she was also a minx of the very first water. It was grossly unfair that she should operate under the insipid name of Lavender. Ginger or pepper would have suited her much better.

There was no contriving, at least not on his part, when Nathaniel and Lavender began to meet in the churchyard. She lived in St. Peter's Street just opposite the church, so it was quite natural that she should sometimes be coming out of the house or going into it at the same time as Nathaniel was entering or leaving the bell tower. Anyway, that was what happened and in time they got to the point of saying, "Evening, Miss Williams," and "Evening, Mr. Wragg." By that time there was some little contriving on Lavender's part. She regarded all young men as her exclusive property. If one of them was so backward that he went neither to pubs, cinemas, dances, nor any other place where she could lay a finger on him, what was a girl to do except contrive?

Other young men would have simply invited Lavender into the bell tower and shown her round, but Nathaniel didn't think that would be right. It would be as bad as an engine-driver taking her for a ride on the foot-plate of his engine. But he did admit to himself now that he wanted to go out with Lavender Williams, and found that, whichever way he turned, his curfew-ringing got in the way. It spoilt the last house of the cinema which began at 7.45, and it spoilt the shady Lovers' Walk along the river because you couldn't very well leave your girl there suddenly and rush back to the bell tower. Curfew from that time onward began to have a pensive, dissatisfied sound.

The Rector was the first to notice how Nathaniel's moods got into his bell-ringing. The Rectory overlooked the churchyard and he had seen the occasional meetings between Nathaniel and Lavender. If it came to a tussle between curfew and Lavender, the Rector was inclined to back Lavender, and he began to tease

the Mayor about the problem of finding another curfew-ringer. The Rector was able to take a calm, detached view because Nathaniel's fifteen pounds a year did not come out of church funds.

From then on the Mayor—and several Councillors—listened to the nightly curfew with the same absorbing interest as the Rector. The pensive note lasted for nearly three weeks and then turned suddenly to a devil-may-care cheerfulness. That lasted for four days, rather diminuendo, and then on a warm, still Thursday evening curfew didn't ring at all.

The Mayor was very glum the next day: he was expecting Nathaniel's official resignation at any moment. But on the Friday curfew rang out quite clearly and soberly, as it ought to ring, and continued like that for another four days. On the Wednesday it was very uncertain, as though it were being rung by a beginner. But that was nothing to what happened the next night. The Rector was sitting with the Mayor in his garden that evening and they looked blankly at each other when they heard the sombre tolling of the bell.

"Good gracious!" the Rector murmured. "Somebody—or something—must be dead."

It was during the three weeks of the pensive curfew that Nathaniel began to meet Lavender in Lovers' Walk instead of the churchyard. Exactly how that happened, and how they came to address each other by their Christian names, is a trade secret and mustn't be divulged. It will suffice to say that Lavender willed it and Nathaniel carried it out.

He would no doubt have kissed her long before that Sunday evening had it not been for the curfew. But he couldn't quite summon up his courage before eight o'clock, and at eight o'clock he had to go rushing back to St. Peter's. It was exactly three minutes to eight when he did kiss her under the red may tree which was in full bloom opposite the duck-pond. He added the words, "I love you very dearly, Lavender," then looked at his watch, and started to run.

Lavender watched his scurrying figure with extremely mixed feelings. Up to that moment the only important thing in the world to her had been Lavender Williams. It annoyed her to find that she was now feeling that Nathaniel was equally, if not more, important. It annoyed her, too, that she didn't like being mean to Nathaniel. She had thoroughly enjoyed being mean to all her other young men, and resented this abrupt change. If this is love, she thought, I'm not at all sure that I like it.

The next three days, much against her will, she was rather

mean to Nathaniel. She gave him no opportunity to kiss her, and teased him about his curfew-ringing. What a pity it was, she said, that he always had to go at eight o'clock just when the river-side was at its nicest. On the Thursday she was first less mean, and then much more so. She gave him two kisses, let him tell her how much he loved her, but then coldly reminded him what time it was.

"It's four minutes to eight, Nathaniel. Perhaps you had better give me one final kiss and then go."

Nathaniel gave her a final kiss, liked it, went on giving it, and curfew did not ring that night.

Lavender was thoroughly ashamed the next morning at getting Nathaniel into trouble. At the same time, she was also strongly tempted to do it just once more before she finally gave in. So, after five more evenings of coolness, she let him make love to her again on the Wednesday. But she again kept reminding him that it was getting very near to eight. He had to prove to her finally that she was more important than all the curfews in the world.

He was proving it quite satisfactorily when the clock struck. But then instead of silence the bell suddenly began to ring out in the still, clear air.

Lavender jerked up from the grassy bank. "What's-that?" she asked.

"Why, curfew, of course," Nathaniel answered, grinning. "Bill Adams is ringing it for me tonight."

Nathaniel was just reaching out to take her in his arms again; but Lavender suddenly burst into floods of tears, slapped his face extremely hard, and ran off alone down Lovers' Walk.

Nathaniel thought it was the end and next night curfew tolled the knell of parting everything.

The rest of the story was quite obvious to anyone who knew the language of bells. Lavender stood the tolling for three nights, then waylaid Nathaniel in the churchyard, and told him that if he married her quickly she would never be mean or smack his face again. That did not bring any immediate peal of joy. Curfew was hesitant, dubious, uncertain for days afterwards; but Nathaniel's confidence was slowly being restored, and his rate of bell-ringing moved up from ten a minute, which was tolling speed, to twenty-four, which was rather more than was necessary for curfew.

They were married within a month by the Rector at St. Peter's. Bill Adams was the best man, and for one week after the wedding it was his uncertain beginner's hand that rang curfew. After that

Nathaniel came back again and there was now a new, calm, steady, authoritative note in his ringing. It was always twenty to the minute: never more, and never less.

This continued for the best part of a year. By then everyone in Sandilow knew that Lavender was expecting. They didn't worry unduly over that until one evening an ambulance was seen at the door of Nathaniel's house. It was common knowledge that the ambulance wasn't due at that house for another week, and they began to stop at street corners and ask if there was any news of Lavender. There was news quite often: not very good news, and they listened for curfew very intently in the evenings. There was a deadly fear abroad that one night curfew would begin to toll again.

That didn't happen. Nathaniel bravely kept to his twenty a minute, but it was a strangely muted bell that rang out over the roof-tops. There were rumours of a Caesarean, rumours of even worse than that; and on the final fatal day they hardly dared listen for curfew at all.

But that night it rang out, peal after peal, even before the clock had finished striking. Nathaniel was dancing round the bell tower ringing every bell he could lay hands on.

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ANSWERS to CHANGE PARTNERS!

on page 52

1. *Titania, in William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."*
2. *Irene Forsyte, in "The Forsyte Saga," by John Galsworthy.*
3. *Widow Wadman, in "Tristram Shandy," by Laurence Sterne.*
4. *The Wife of Bath, in "The Canterbury Tales," by Geoffrey Chaucer.*
5. *Annie Arden (née Lee), in the poem "Enoch Arden," by Alfred Tennyson.*
6. *Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, in "Under Milk Wood," by Dylan Thomas.*
7. *Tess Durbeyfield, in Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles."*
8. *Mrs. Nickleby, in "Nicholas Nickleby," by Charles Dickens.*

DANGEROUS WIDOWS

There was something very wrong in the house

by MIGNON G. EBERHART

ONE of my widows telephoned to me at one o'clock on Friday, and the other telephoned to me at three o'clock on Friday, and both of them invited me urgently to spend the week-end at their country place.

Neither, however, was a social invitation; each widow said frankly she was in need of my advice. In fact, it was an invitation to murder.

In literal fact, too, neither woman was my widow in the accepted sense. They were Grant Briggs's widows. Both, however, were very likely to fall within my scope of duty for I am a banker, elderly enough to be entrusted with the somewhat difficult chore of advising, coaxing, cajoling, and generally acting as nursemaid to widows who seem strangely determined to invest in non-existent uranium-ore deposits and dry oil wells.

The two Mrs. Briggses were Grant's wives; one was his first wife, Frances Briggs, divorced and never remarried; the other, Eloise Briggs, was his second wife. Grant Briggs was one of my old clients. And the country house each referred to was the same country house, for it had been left to them, jointly, by his will.

Consequently a rather delicate situation was in the making. I took the 5.30 train to Stamford.

Grant Briggs had been a client of the bank's for a long time, and I had had much to do with his affairs, especially during his last illness—but I had never met either Mrs. Briggs.

I cannot say that I faced the prospect with any pleasure. I do not like strife or emotions, and both were far too likely to develop. As I got out of the train and looked down the long platform I wondered which one would meet me and thus possibly endeavour to get in her claims first.

Neither did. A thickset, red-faced man, done to a turn in flagrantly country clothes, approached me and said with a hearty, jolly manner, " Mr. Wickwyre? "

I nodded. He put out a large red hand. His face was jovial and friendly; he had shrewd, cold, blue eyes. " I'm Tom Muller—friend of Grant's. The station waggon is this way."

I said, " Quite so," and followed him.

He put my bag in the station waggon, and wedged himself, puffing, behind the wheel. " I'm staying at the house. Thought I might be of some service to them." He negotiated a turn amid traffic.

I said, " Indeed."

His blue eyes shot me a rather narrow glance. " Yes. Frances—that's the first wife—arrived on Thursday night by train. Henry was buried that afternoon, you'll remember. Eloise—that's the second wife—was here, of course."

I said, perhaps somewhat dryly, " And when did you arrive, Mr. Muller? "

He paused to examine a road sign rather deliberately. " Oh, I came up later on Thursday night. Seemed to me I owed it to Grant. It's an odd situation leaving the property like that. Do you know either Mrs. Briggs? "

Something about his manner went against the grain. I said stiffly that I hadn't had that pleasure.

He chuckled. " They're as like as two peas in a pod—extremely attractive women. You'll see. And there's a fight brewing there, mark my words. Neither is the sort to give up easily. I don't envy you, Mr. Wickwyre."

" I am in no sense an arbiter. That is for the lawyers." I spoke coldly enough to penetrate even Mr. Tom Muller's hide. We concluded our ride along the winding country roads in silence.

The house and grounds, when we reached them, proved to be on a rather lavish scale, with velvety lawns, swimming-pool, tennis court, gardens. It represented, I knew, the whole of Grant Briggs's property; he had had a fairly large income, but had lived up to it. I had arrived at an approximate sum which I thought the property might fetch and was deducting, in my mind, such things as possible capital gains and taxes when we drew up at the white-columned entrance.

Here two women stood waiting; both advanced to greet me as I got out of the car. And at least in one instance Muller was right; allowing for possibly fifteen years' difference in age they were very much alike. Both slender, fine-featured, blonde, and extremely attractive.

The younger, the second Mrs. Briggs, spoke to me first, putting out a jewelled hand towards mine; she introduced me to the first Mrs. Briggs, while Tom Muller stood close by with a rather stupid grin on his red face and a very watchful look in those shrewd eyes. We went at once into the house.

A maid took my bag upstairs. Cocktails were set out on a tray

in the spacious living-room. It was an imposing room, full of what might be called objets d'art and dominated by a huge portrait of Grant Briggs, done apparently when he was a rather young man, at least twenty years before his death.

Eloise, the young Mrs. Briggs, in her proper role of hostess, saw to it that I was comfortably seated, and asked me my preference as to cocktails. In the soft light from the table-lamps the likeness between the two women diminished. They were the same general type, that was all.

The first Mrs. Briggs, Frances, was thinner, and finer-drawn than the second with darker hair and penetrating blue eyes. She wore a simple, and certainly inexpensive, white cotton dress and no jewellery except her wedding-ring.

Eloise was almost beautiful, with a magnolia skin, soft red mouth, and a rather luxuriant figure. Her dress was simple, too, but even my bachelor eyes perceived that it was an expensive simplicity; a diamond bracelet sparkled on her wrist.

It was Eloise who, again assuming her unquestionably correct position of authority, said that if I agreed, both she and the other Mrs. Briggs preferred to postpone our discussion of business until morning. I agreed most sincerely. Tom Muller helped himself to another drink, at which both Mrs. Briggses looked at him coldly. The maid who had taken my bag announced dinner.

Apart from the fact that Tom Muller became talkative in a jovial, rallying way, it was a quiet and merely social dinner. Not a word that was said, not a gesture, suggested potential strife between the two Mrs. Briggses. They were, in short, perfect ladies.

The evening was an early one. Eloise showed me to my room. "I hope you'll not mind coming down to breakfast," she said. "The maid lives in the village and goes home at night."

I assured her that it didn't matter. "By the way, Mrs. Briggs, exactly why did you ask me to come here?"

She hesitated for a second. Then she came close to me; her lovely mouth smiled invitingly. She put both hands appealingly on my arm. "Because I need your help."

Perfume wafted towards me; there was a deep glow in her eyes. I recoiled slightly. "I'm afraid the only help I can give you is to advise you to put the settlement of the estate in the care of your lawyer."

Her hands, of necessity, dropped. She eyed me for a moment. Then she said, "Of course. Good night, Mr. Wickwyre."

It was all very calm, all very polite. But there was something very wrong in the house. I was obliged to wait, however, until the house was quiet before I went softly downstairs again and

out of the door. I took the road to the village. It was a dark night, with scudding clouds.

Lights were still on in the village, and the café had a public telephone booth.

There are certain short cuts to certain kinds of information which a banker knows. Nevertheless, since it was by then rather late, it took some time to accomplish my purpose.

Fortunately, in a way, I was under the interested observation of the young man behind the soda fountain the whole time, and indeed, bought an ice-cream soda from him. He had, however, told me that he'd have to shut up shop in another ten minutes when my New York call came through.

He turned off the lights as I left the café and made my way back to the Briggs house. It seemed a rather short walk for I was thinking deeply, and it was with a sense of surprise that I turned in at the gates.

I stopped there, struck with another kind of surprise. The house was ablaze with lights. And then I heard the thud of approaching cars. Indeed, I ducked out of the driveway barely in time as the first one took the curve and shot up to the entrance.

Other cars and motor-cycles followed it. By the time I had run across the grass and reached the house the entire village constabulary as well as state troopers were swarming into the house, where Tom Muller lay, dead from a revolver shot, on the rug below Grant's portrait.

I pushed my way there, passing Eloise and Frances, white and frightened, in the hall.

Tom Muller's thick body lay apparently as it had fallen. His too fancy country Oxfords were sprawled wide apart. His brightly checked jacket was crumpled. A gun lay near his hand.

It was dawn when the police at last went away. Both Mrs. Briggses, exhausted and tense with strain, went upstairs as the last police-car disappeared down the drive. I watched them go. And I wondered which Mrs. Briggs had murdered him.

Not that the police called it murder. The inquiry had been a long one, their questions had been many; they had taken our finger-prints; they had determined the ownership of the gun, which had belonged to Grant. But they had been guarded and reticent. They had not—as yet—called it murder.

They had listened to my own story, which luckily the young man in the café could substantiate. They had listened to the stories of the two Mrs. Briggses, which were identical. Each had been awakened, she said, by the sound of the shot; each had waited a few moments, questioning it; they had come into the

hall at almost the same time and then downstairs together to find Tom Muller—dead.

They had telephoned for the police. They had tried to rouse me and discovered my absence. They had been afraid that I, too, had been a victim of some robber who might still be about the grounds. When asked if either of them believed that Tom Muller had been depressed by Grant's death to the point of suicide both appeared doubtful.

It was not suicide. It was murder.

But I didn't know which one had murdered him. I listened as their light footsteps, the whisper of their movements, died away above. Then I went back to the living-room. Tom Muller's body had been removed but the room still seemed to hold his presence and it was not a pleasant one.

The room was in considerable disorder, chairs pushed about, the rug upon which Muller had died rolled up into a corner, small tables and lamps shoved aside carelessly, the portrait of Grant Briggs slightly askew on the wall.

I preferred not to touch the rug, or indeed approach it, but being a banker and a bachelor and possibly somewhat finicky in habits of tidiness, I straightened chairs and tables. No clues, of course; I hadn't really expected that there would be. I went to Grant's huge portrait with its heavy frame and straightened that, too. It seemed rather oddly out of place. Someone's shoulder must have brushed against it.

I measured, absently really, my own shoulder height below the portrait. I am not a tall man, but the lower corner of the gilded frame was at least a foot above my own shoulder. So someone's hand had pushed it aside. I stood looking at Grant for a moment. Then I got a chair and climbed on it and looked behind the portrait.

Some time later I straightened the portrait carefully, got down from the chair, restored it to its place, and sat in it. Something was going to happen, and it would have to happen rather soon.

I cannot say it was a pleasant wait. I hoped there was not another gun in the house. Somewhere a clock was ticking with an ominous, warning note as if to remind me of the fleeting quality of time.

It had run out swiftly for Tom Muller. I am not a brave man; when I heard the faint rustle of a woman's garment on the stairway, the very soft whisper of footsteps, I had to force myself to remain—waiting.

She must have seen the light in the room; still, she thought it was empty, for when she appeared as quietly as a ghost in the

doorway and saw me, she caught her breath and flung both hands to her throat. It was Frances, the first Mrs. Briggs.

After a moment she came towards me, her négligé gathered around her. Her fine eyes were very bright. "I didn't know you were here. I came to—to look. I had to see if there was something, anything the police didn't see. Mr. Wickwyre—Eloise killed him."

It was, of course, on the cards. One of them would accuse the other; indeed, each might accuse the other, the murderess because she must shield herself with a lie, the other because she must shield herself with the truth. I said, "Why?"

Her hands moved towards each other. "I don't know. But I think it had something to do with money. Tom Muller was simply not the kind of man to come here and stay here out of sympathy. He wanted something."

"Mrs. Briggs, why did you send for me?"

Her bright eyes didn't waver. "Because Muller was here. I didn't trust him. I was going to ask you to get rid of him.

"*I* did not kill him. But I know Eloise murdered him. No one else was there."

"I *didn't kill him*," Eloise said clearly from the doorway. "So it must have been you!" She was wearing a long floating négligé, and she had a gun in her hand.

Violence has never been, so to speak, my métier. I felt a creeping chill up my backbone. But I had to get both women and myself out of the room, and, of course, I'd have to get that gun.

I said, "We are all very tired. I suggest that you two ladies—er—dress while I prepare some sort of breakfast for us." I went to Eloise. "Whose gun is that?"

"Mine. Grant got it for me."

"What were you going to do with it?"

She looked at me. "I don't know," she said blankly and I think truthfully.

"You'd better give it to me."

She did so at once, which both surprised and pleased me. I said briskly, "I'll see to coffee," and went out of the room and through the dining-room to the kitchen where I set up a great clatter with pots and pans. I made a mistake, however, when for safety's sake I dropped the gun into the flour-bin.

I gave them barely time to dress and to accomplish what one of them had to accomplish in the living-room, and consequently burnt the toast while I was watching the clock. But as I took it and coffee into the dining-room, Frances Briggs came in, charming and fresh in blue linen. After a moment Eloise, lovely and fresh in pink, entered also.

Both seized upon coffee, neither spoke, and I was uneasily aware of stored-up dynamite. A very slight jar was all too likely to induce an explosion and I was not ready for that. So, when I spoke, I did so cautiously.

" In view of the circumstances, I'd like to suggest that we postpone our business talk. But I have a request to make. I was an old friend of Grant's. If neither of you wishes to keep the portrait of him, I wonder if you would be so kind as to give it to me."

Eloise's eyes leapt to me above the rim of her coffee-cup. She put the cup down, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. She said from behind it, " Of course. I didn't realize that you felt that way about Grant. I have other pictures of Grant. He—he would want you to have it." She dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

" Thank you," I said and turned to Frances, who had risen. She said, " I'm sorry. I'll not pretend that I was in love with Grant when he met you, Eloise. I was not heart-broken when he asked me for a divorce; I agreed to it. But once, when Grant and I were young, when that portrait was made, I loved him. I'm sorry, Mr. Wickwyre, I want the portrait."

So I knew what I had to know. I said something about understanding it, made an excuse, and left the room.

I let myself out cautiously through the back door. A grape arbour ran along there, towards the garage, and I took shelter behind it. I reached the garage and was opening the door of the station waggon when Eloise ran into the garage.

" Mr. Wickwyre—where are you going? "

" To the police—will you drive? I'm not accustomed to this car. Besides it might be safer."

" Safer! Do you mean she—" She gave a kind of quick gasp and then slid behind the wheel. " Take the back way down to the road," I said. " The trees and shrubbery may shield us from the house."

The sun was up, streaking across shrubbery and lawns and making a bright path of the country road. She knew the way to the state police headquarters. She went in with me, and the young Lieutenant who had directed the night's inquiry was at his desk, using the telephone, when we were shown into his office. He looked pleased and relaxed; his revolver lay on the desk.

" Oh, there you are. I was about to phone you. The finger-prints on the gun are Tom Muller's. So it was probably suicide."

Finger-prints, of course, can be placed on guns after death, but I didn't care to argue with him about that. I gave one longing

thought towards the gun in the flour-bin and said, " I'm afraid I have evidence to the contrary. If you'll search the Briggs house you'll find a package of notes, given for loans advanced by Tom Muller and signed by Grant Briggs. The signatures are forgeries. And in the meantime—" I cleared my throat—"kindly arrest Mrs. Eloise Briggs at once and charge her—"

I couldn't finish because Eloise was too quick; she snatched the officer's revolver. Two shots went wild, a third crashed through the window, and then the young Lieutenant had her tight in his arms, but it was not a loverlike embrace.

He released her when other police rushed in. I crawled out from under the desk with such dignity as I could summon. The young Lieutenant was also very quick. " The notes," he said, panting and blushing deeply, " are probably on her. Get the matron from the village, Sergeant."

He was right. The notes, a rather bulky package, were concealed in a feminine garment which I believe is called a bra. I must say I was relieved to see them; she had had neither time nor opportunity to destroy them, but I had run it rather fine.

Back at the house, after certain formalities had been concluded, I had a conversation with the young Lieutenant and with Frances Briggs.

" So Muller lent her all that money," the Lieutenant said, "and I take it that he thought he was lending it to Grant during his illness, but she forged Grant's signatures."

I nodded. " He probably discovered, or knew from the beginning, that it was forgery. After Grant's death he—er—"

" Put the screws on," the Lieutenant said. " He wouldn't give up; he must have demanded quite a price. So she shot him. But then—"

" Then she had to get out of the room and up the backstairs in a hurry. She got the notes out of his pocket, shoved them behind the portrait, put his finger-prints on the gun and ran up the back way. Frances Briggs came into the hall at about that time."

" But how did you know? "

" I found the notes. I didn't know which woman had shot him or which one had forged the notes and thus must get possession of them again. I gave both women time, I was afraid too much time, but—at any rate, then I asked for Grant's portrait.

" I knew that the woman who had shot Muller would not want the portrait; she wouldn't want any association with so strong a reminder of guilt. So a rejection of the portrait would be an indication that the notes had been successfully removed. Eloise leapt at the chance to get rid of the portrait. Frances," I bowed towards the other Mrs. Briggs, " wished to keep it."

The Lieutenant eyed me. So did Frances.

I added, " I must tell you that I had had occasion to make some inquiries by telephone about Eloise; she was wearing jewellery; she was dressed expensively; in short, I found that she had staggering charge accounts and spent far more money than Grant (remember, I am in a position to know) could have given her. So where was she getting the money? Why was Tom Muller there at the house? "

" Oh," Frances said.

But the Lieutenant said astutely, " You must have more solid—well, evidence. Some definite basis for suspicion! "

I sighed. There is a sad truth in a banker's life which he must early recognize, accept, and arm himself against. I told the Lieutenant. " When anybody urgently wishes to see any banker, he—she—wants to borrow money. Frances Briggs had a different reason which was sound and sensible. But Eloise—"

" She wanted to borrow enough money on the property to pay off Muller! " the Lieutenant cried. " Did she ask you for a loan? "

" Not," I said, " precisely."

Suddenly the Lieutenant grinned. " Oh, I see. But you weren't having any—I mean to say that you were not—that is, her charm—that is—" He blushed, looked apologetic, and tried to stop grinning.

" Oh, Mr. Wickwyre! " Frances Briggs leaned towards me with a lovely smile, her magnificent eyes warm. " You *are* a detective! And a very courageous man."

There are more ways than one in which an attractive widow may be dangerous. I rose rather quickly and said I had to return to town. Indeed, when another widow invited me to her house on Long Island the next week-end I sent a subordinate in my place.

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

PAUL GALLICO

CARYL BRAHMS

NIGEL BALCHIN

★

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Order Your Copy Now

BEDTIME STORY

The way to bliss lies not on beds of down

Paroemiologia Anglo-Latina, 1639

Turn out more ale, turn up the light;
I will not go to bed tonight.
Of all the foes that man should dread
The first and worst one is a bed . . .

For me tonight no bed prepare,
But set me out my oaken chair.
And bid no other guests beside
The ghosts that shall around me glide;
In curling smoke-wreaths I shall see
A fair and gentle company.
Though silent all, rare revellers they,
Who leave you not till break of day.
Go you who would not daylight see,
But not tonight a bed for me:
For I've been born and I've been wed—
All of man's peril comes of bed.

CHARLES HENRY WEBB,
Dum Vivimus Vigilamus

Midnight Feast

Soon after this a small hanging door opened, and I was called by a female voice into another room that was very finely hung, and a very rich bed in it, only one silver lamp on a table.

The lady was of a very fine stature, fine hair, fine teeth and eyes, much painted after the Portuguese manner. She caressed me very much, and told me if she had not seen me so, she should have been the most miserable wretch in the world, as she had been ever since the bull-feast last year that she saw me, and perceived I had taken notice of her. I could not recall any thing about it, nor was I recovered of my surprise, it appeared all a dream to me. She perceived the amazement I was in, and caressed me the more. However, feeling myself in the arms of a very fine and a very luxurious woman, those sensations soon began to get the better of all others, as they were ever ready enough to do with me. A maid-servant soon after brought some sweetmeats and water. I took only a dried apricot and ate it.

She told me our time was short and we must go to bed, which I did not hesitate as she had fired me all over. I put my pocket-pistols under my head, and passed a most joyous night.

Augustus Hervey's Journal,
23rd October, 1753

Inside Story

Under the bed they search'd, and there they found—
No matter what—it was not what they sought;
They open'd windows, gazing if the ground
Had signs or footmarks, but the earth said nought;
And then they stared each other's faces round:
'Tis odd, not one of all these seekers thought,
And seems to me almost a sort of blunder,
Of looking in *the bed as well as under.*

LORD BYRON, *Don Juan*

Bit of Fluff

When she handed the ring to Gran, the old lady had fumbled with it for a moment, and then dropped it on the floor. Mary knew that she could not help it, but as she crawled on the worn carpet looking for her ring, she was choking with dust and fury. Why did she ask for it if she knew she could not hold it?

When she stood up again, Gran said: "Let me look at it," and held out her hand as if nothing had happened. The next time she dropped the ring, it rolled under the bed.

Mary bit her lip, shot a smouldering glance at her mother, and dived down into the dark, infested cavern, whose roof creaked and groaned as Gran moved on the protesting springs. There was room to get her head and shoulders under, and she groped about shrinking from the accumulation of years of Annie's sweepings. Her lovely ring—she would never find it. Her searching hand touched nameless, repugnant things and suddenly, to her horror, she felt the yielding warmth of human flesh.

Then she heard Sam, laughing and choking, quite close to her. He had crawled under from the other side.

"I've got it," he said, and kissed her, there in the unspeakable vault under Gran's bed, that no longer seemed quite so unspeakable. When he crawled out again, he had a bit of fluff in one eyebrow and a trace of lipstick on his mouth. Gran watched him more darkly than ever and called him Mr. Hubbard.

MONICA DICKENS, *Mariana*

Noctis Equi

"Whoa there, my beauties!" cried grandpa. His voice sounded very young and loud, and his tongue had powerful hooves, and he made his bedroom into a great meadow . . .

He was sitting straight up in bed and rocking from side to side as though the bed were on a rough road; the knotted edges of the counterpane were his reins; his invisible horses stood in a shadow beyond the bedside candle. Over a white flannel night-shirt he was wearing a red waistcoat with walnut-sized brass buttons. The over-filled bowl of his pipe smouldered among his whiskers like a little, burning hayrick on a stick. At the sight of me, his hands dropped from the reins and lay blue and quiet, the bed stopped still on a level road, he muffled his tongue into silence, and the horses drew softly up.

"Is there anything the matter, grandpa?" I asked, though the clothes were not on fire. His face in the candlelight looked like a ragged quilt pinned upright on the black air and patched all over with goat-beards.

He stared at me mildly. Then he blew down his pipe, scattering the sparks and making a high, wet dog-whistle of the stem, and shouted: "Ask no questions."

After a pause, he said slyly: "Do you ever have nightmares, boy?"

I said: "No."

"Oh, yes, you do," he said.

I said I was woken by a voice that was shouting to horses.

"What did I tell you?" he said. "You eat too much. Who ever heard of horses in a bedroom?"

He fumbled under his pillow, brought out a small, tinkling bag, and carefully untied its strings. He put a sovereign in my hand, and said: "Buy a cake." I thanked him and wished him good night.

As I closed my bedroom door, I heard his voice crying loudly and gaily, "Gee-up! gee-up!" and the rocking of the travelling bed.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*

Unseasonable

Thomson, who sung about the "Seasons," said
It was a glorious thing to rise *in season;*
But then he said it lying—in his bed,
At ten o'clock a.m.—the very reason
He wrote so charmingly. The simple fact is,
His preaching wasn't sanctioned by his practice . . .

J. G. SAXE, 1816–1887, *Early Rising*

★ *In this amusing extract from his recent book, "The House that Nino Built," the famous Italian author of the delightful "Little World of Don Camillo" is moving house (and cat), with the doubtful assistance of his imperious small daughter, who is mockingly known as the Red Duchess.*

MOVING DAY

by GIOVANNI GUARESCHI

JUST a short while before zero hour on our M-for-Moving Day, I saw the Red Duchess holding our cat. He was the gentlest feline in all the world. I never knew a less catlike cat. He was so little like a cat that to hear him miaow was positively startling. He had let himself be wrapped up like a sack of potatoes, without moving a single claw in self-defence.

When we were just about to leave, I picked him up by the scruff of his neck and put him into the Duchess's arms. She and her mother and brother were in Carletto's car, while I carried the luggage in ours. The cat didn't budge, and anyone would have thought he was asleep.

But when Carletto started the motor, there was a terrible upheaval and he seemed to have turned into an angry lion. He whistled and howled; as far as I know, he roared and trumpeted as well, and for a moment it seemed as if a whole army of cats were in the car. Finally he slipped through a half-open window and leapt to the ground.

A second later he was at the top of the tallest tree in the garden. When we had recovered from our astonishment, we called and called and called, but it was of no avail.

"We'll just have to leave without him," I decided.

At that, there was another upheaval in Carletto's car, and in no time the wailing Duchess had slipped out in pursuit of the cat, and started to climb the tree.

"If he's not coming, I'm not either," she shouted.

We all got out of the car and went into the house. Ten minutes later, the Duchess came to join us, with the cat in her arms. This was just about what we had expected, and as soon as the cat was within my reach I took hold of him, put him into a wicker basket, and wired down the cover.

He didn't resist, and when I looked through the holes in the

basket I saw him crouching at the bottom, and heard him purr. We piled back into the car, but no sooner had Carletto stepped on the clutch than the basket began to dance on the seat and emit a loud noise. Fortunately, it was well built, and held up against the strain.

We started towards Cremona, with Carletto going ahead, and everything went well until after Paullo, where Carletto came to a sudden stop.

I stopped too, and waited. "If you ask me," I said to my friend Luigi, who was sitting beside me and had the job of stemming the avalanche of luggage in the rear, "it's going to be the same story all over again. First the cat will be out, then the Duchess, Margherita, and Albertino, in succession."

Instead, Carletto was the one to leave the car and he came back to speak to me. "Either put your daughter in a cage, too, or I'm not going any further," he threatened. "The cat is raising a terrible row in the basket, and as a result your daughter is making just as much of a row outside."

I was disappointed, but my disappointment didn't last long. Out of the window of Carletto's car hurtled a combination cat-and-basket, the cat having clawed and bitten a hole in the wicker so that now he ran with his front paws free and only his rear paws imprisoned inside. After him came the shrieking Duchess, and in a moment they were both out of sight down a path leading into some woods. I asked Luigi to change to Carletto's car.

"You two go on ahead," I said, "and I'll take up the slack and follow after." Then I drove the car to the beginning of the path and waited.

About twenty minutes must have gone by before the Duchess appeared, with the cat in her arms. But as soon as he caught sight of the car, he wriggled loose and ran to look at us from fifty feet away.

"Get in!" I ordered the Duchess. "Or else I'll sell you for fifty lire to those gipsies encamped up there at the crossroad."

"I'm not going to leave my cat," said the Duchess.

"We shan't leave him," I assured her. "We'll go very slowly, and that way he'll come after us."

The Duchess climbed into the car and I drove it at a cat's pace for about a hundred yards, after which I stepped on the accelerator and went full speed ahead. If I had had three hands, I might have gone on, but as it was I had to stop after a quarter of a mile, because the Duchess had unleashed a full-fledged people's revolution.

As soon as the car came to a stop she slipped out, jumped over the ditch on the side of the road, and disappeared behind the

hedge. I lit a cigarette and let it hang out of my mouth. That will give you some idea of my nonchalant frame of mind. After all, I could do nothing but wait.

I waited twenty minutes at least, but the Duchess did not return. I got out and called her at the top of my voice, but the only reply was a gentle miaow, and there was the cat, crouching on the other side of the ditch.

I swore at him roundly. "Where's the child?" I shouted, but I couldn't catch his reply.

At that moment a car drew up just behind mine. It was Carletto. "Didn't you go ahead?" I asked him.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then why did you arrive from behind me?"

"I don't know," said Carletto. "You'll have to ask your wife. Only, she isn't here."

"Where is she?"

"She got out when we met your daughter searching for the cat. The little boy got out, too, and now they're all three scouring the fields."

"The cat's here," I started to tell him, but the cat had disappeared.

We decided that the only reasonable thing to do was to go in opposite directions. Carletto would go back towards Milan and I would continue towards Cremona, and one of us would surely meet them.

"If you haven't found them by the time you reach Milan, then just turn round and come back, and I'll do the same thing when I get as far as Soresina," I suggested.

Carletto opened the door of his car, but no sooner was he inside than he hurriedly lowered the window. "The cat!" he shouted. "The cat's on the back seat."

I helped Carletto to put him out of the car, and then we both drove slowly off. I didn't meet a soul, and at Soresina I turned round and came back. The operation was conducted in an unexpectedly harmonious manner, for Carletto and I arrived simultaneously at the point of departure. The cat was still sitting beside the ditch, waiting imperturbably to see what would happen next.

Just then we heard shouts from the direction of Milan and saw our little lost group approaching.

"You might have stopped when I called you!" said Margherita to Carletto. He hadn't seen her at all, and he tried to explain.

"Never mind," Margherita interrupted. "Now the problem is the cat. The child will die of a broken heart if we don't find him."

I pointed him out to her, crouching on the edge of the ditch. He wore an air of supreme boredom and indifference, as if he had nothing at all to do with the tragedy.

Margherita sighed. " Anyhow, all of us are together. That's the most important thing."

" Almost all of us," put in Carletto. " I don't see Luigi."

Indeed, there was nothing remotely resembling Luigi in the vicinity.

" Didn't he get in with you? " I asked Carletto.

Carletto threw out his arms. " I don't know a thing," he stammered. " All I know is I don't want the cat."

" Very well," I answered. " Reload your passengers, all except for the Duchess, and drive on without stopping until you reach your destination."

Carletto drove off with Margherita and Albertino towards Cremona, while the Duchess and I remained alone.

" It's not so far, really," I said to her, " only about forty miles. I'll go very slowly, and you and the cat can follow."

I set out, and the Duchess trotted along the ditch for a while, with the cat behind her. Finally, she grew tired. " I'm getting in," she said. " Go on just as slowly as you did before, so that the cat can keep up with us."

I went slowly, and for over a mile the cat followed. Then someone called out to me from a tavern beside the road. It was Luigi, sitting outside over a glass of red wine, and I told him to get into the car.

" No," he said, " I'm waiting for the bus. I have a wife, children, and a dog at home."

I raised the window and started the engine, but a threatening yowl made me take my hand off the gear. The cat was kicking up right beside me, in the Red Duchess's arms.

" Get out! " I said to him, opening the door. But he did not move.

I shut the door and started off. He yowled for a while, but without scratching, until finally he stopped, and the rest of the trip was easy.

When we reached the house the others were not to be seen, and they didn't turn up until three hours later.

" Where have you been? " I asked.

" To Bergamo," Carletto answered. " Somewhere I took a left turn instead of a right. But it's just as well, because there we found Luigi."

Luigi was the last to get out. He was shamefully drunk and, hanging on to a column of the portico, he sobbed: " I'll never see my home and children again! "

"He's a sentimental sort," my wife proffered. "Let him get it out of his system." And she went on to say that she had actually enjoyed the trip.

We couldn't dislodge the cat from my car. He was fast asleep and we had to take his food out to him in the garage. Eventually he gave up his sit-down strike, but only when he felt sure we were going to stay put. Then he returned to being the gentlest cat in the world, and if anyone stepped on his tail, his miaow was as soft as if it came from some other planet.

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 12

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's twelfth Prize Crossword Competition :—

Miss D. Barkworth, Windsor Road, Torquay, Devon.

Miss M. K. Bowie, Highfield Drive, Glasgow.

Norman W. Hampshire Esq., Manchester Road, Thunstone, near Sheffield, Yorks.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Burden.* 9, *Evangeline.* 10, *Ignore.* 11, *Ditto ditto.* 12, *Hinges.* 13, *Brutishly.* 14, *Slates.* 16, *Panic.* 19, *Sorrow.* 21, *Base camps.* 23, *Untied.* 24, *Thresholds.* 25, *Hearth.* 26, *Break a rule.* 27, *Retort.*

Down. 2, *Ungainly.* 3, *Drought.* 4, *Needs.* 5, *Castor and Pollux.* 6, *Agnostics.* 7, *Ellipse.* 8, *Instil.* 15, *Spearhead.* 17, *Pole Star.* 18, *Senegal.* 20, *Retract.* 22, *Adhere.* 23, *Usher.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 15

Argosy's fifteenth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first *five* correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to:

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 15),
3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp),

to arrive by Monday, August 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale October 8th.

ARGOSY

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MARGIN OF TERROR

by

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

First publication of
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★ *William P. McGivern, well-known author of American crime stories, including "The Big Heat," shifts his scene to Europe in this outstanding new thriller.*

Danger throws a black shadow across the sun-drenched streets of Rome—against the beauty and timeless splendour of that ancient city a ruthless modern menace weaves its threatening web of mystery and peril.

THE FIRST PART

HE sat at the American bar in the Hotel Ariosto, a tall, solidly built man in his early thirties, toying with a glass of chilled vermouth, and thinking with pleasurable nostalgia that this was almost the end of his long stay in Rome. I'm going back to America, he was thinking, and although he was alone he smiled and raised his glass in a toast to his reflection in the mirror.

His name was Mark Rayburn and he had been in Italy two years, supervising the construction of a pipeline from Leghorn to Milan. Now the job was done. The headaches of the last two years, the tensions stemming from conflicting national interests, were beginning to lose their vividness and significance as they flowed into his past. I'd make a good diplomat, he thought, and the idea brought a grin to his lips. Smiling, there was a shyness about him that belied the hard closed look of his face in repose.

He was a big man, with a powerful, work-toughened body, and severe, uncompromising features. His skin was deeply tanned, not prettily from the sun, but from exposure to all kinds of weather. But all of this was contradicted by his eyes; unless he was angry, and that was a luxury he denied himself, his eyes were warm, understanding, and good-humoured.

Now he glanced at his watch; it was four o'clock. His flight was at six, and his bags were packed. He still had about an hour.

There was no one else in the dim, sombrely decorated lounge, except a young woman reading a French newspaper. She sat at a table, her white gloves placed neatly beside a Negroni cocktail, turning the pages of her paper with casual interest.

American, he guessed, glancing at her for the third or fourth time. She was sitting in profile to him and there was no danger of being caught staring. The little black suit with the red flower on the lapel looked expensive and French, but her manner with the waiter, casual and friendly, was undoubtedly American.

He glanced at the bar-tender, nodded towards the girl, and raised his eyebrows. The waiter shrugged and shook his head, smiling.

Probably a tourist, in today and out next week, Mark thought, with an orderly list of pictures and churches to see in that time. He was tempted to ask her to have a drink with him; it would be

fun to tell her about the things she might enjoy doing in Rome.

She probably wouldn't mind. There was an approachable quality about her, in spite of her elegant clothes and aristocratic profile. She had lovely hair, very nearly black, and a trim, firm figure that looked as if it were used to riding or tennis. He realized then with some embarrassment that he was building a pretty, gracious frame for her, setting her among stables and dogs, and a big house framed in trees.

He was rather relieved when a man he knew, Johnny Dreyk, came into the lounge and sauntered towards him, smiling. He didn't like Johnny Dreyk but this would put an end to his pointless speculations about the girl. He realized, then, that he was feeling a bit lonely and sorry for himself; leaving Italy was part of it, but loneliness had always been a condition of his; he wasn't married, and he had no flair for quick, casual relationships.

" Well, it's ave atque vale, I guess," Johnny said, as he took an adjoining stool. " This is the big day, isn't it? "

" That's right. Drink? "

Johnny grinned. " I'd hardly skip a last chance to cadge a drink." He ordered in Italian, specifying the brand of whisky and the kind and amount of soda, in a manner which brought an insultingly impassive expression to the bar-tender's face. Then he turned back to Mark, smiling: " Well, off you go, eh? Back to rejoin the fascists of our own dear native land. But how can you? Really, it defeats me."

" I'm going home because I want to," Mark said. He kept his tone even, for he had learnt that Johnny enjoyed nothing so much as baiting Americans. Johnny was American himself, but the connection meant little to him; he had been in Europe since the end of the War, writing freelance articles for the communist press of France and Italy. He was extremely shrewd and well-informed; the air of ostentatious cynicism he affected was no index to the quality of his mind.

He sighed now, toying with his glass: " Well, it depresses me if it's your own decision," he said. " It makes it difficult for me to maintain my modest estimate of your common sense."

" That wounds me all to hell," Mark said.

" Now, now, sarcasm doesn't become you, old chap. You're the slow steady type, ready to dash off to war at the drop of a dividend."

Mark kept a grip on his temper. He didn't want to spoil this afternoon, his last in Rome, with a stupid quarrel: " Let's skip it," he said.

" O.K., we'll skip it," Johnny said, smiling. There was rarely any genuine heat in his arguments. He enjoyed amusing himself at the expense of others but he regarded passion as a bourgeois trap, an indecent exercise for men of sense and taste. Oddly enough, this lent him a certain charm; his indifference was accepted as a mark of good-humoured tolerance.

Physically he was tall and slightly built, with alert eyes and a

thin, intelligent face. He let his streaked blond hair grow long and never bothered to brush it back from his forehead. All of this—the deliberate, tweedy untidiness, the disengaged cynicism, the penetrating humour—invested him with an unpretentious donnish quality. But people who accepted him at this estimate usually regretted it.

Now he said, " I suppose the newest thing, in the line of news, is still the disappearance of Papa George."

" There's nothing more on it? "

Johnny spread his hands, palms up, in a humorous imitation of the Italian gesture, " Niente! I presume, of course, that since he escaped from you Americans he's on his way to Moscow."

" I thought Papa George was kidnapped," Mark said drily. " Maybe I'm reading the wrong papers."

" But, of course. You didn't see my last article? "

" I must have missed it. You know my enthusiasm for the communist press."

Johnny smiled. " The British and Americans are trying to create the impression that Papa George was kidnapped," he said. " That's natural, of course. It would be terribly embarrassing for them to admit the truth."

" Which is what? "

" He took his first chance and made a break for it. When he gets to Moscow he'll be able to tell the truth."

" You mean he'll confess? " Mark said, and now there was an edge on his voice.

" You mustn't take this all so seriously," Johnny said. " It's politics, pure and simple, and that's an area in which you're grotesquely naïve." He ordered a second whisky, as another man entered the lounge and walked heavily towards a leather chair against the wall.

This man was in his middle fifties, broad and powerfully built, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair and square, solemn features. He wore a black overcoat, a black suit, and carried a narrow-brimmed green felt hat in one big hand. There was a certain massive dignity about him, which put a spring in the step of the waiter who went to take his order.

Mark heard him order an aperitif in a deep, pleasing voice, and then he picked up his own glass and glanced at his watch. It was 4.15 now, and the pleasantly nostalgic mood he had been enjoying fifteen minutes before was gone.

Johnny glanced at him, grinning. " Another? "

" No, I'll pass."

He was still thinking about Papa George, and it was that which contributed to his irritation and depression. The old man, who was Dimitri Georgovich, a Russian-born, naturalized American, had disappeared two weeks before from his hotel in Liége. He had been seen last with a young man, variously described as a Dane, a German, an American, and an Englishman, and the two of them had faded into thin air.

These were the simple facts; but the implications were far from simple.

Papa George had escaped from Russia in 1927, a few weeks before the commencement of his trial. The charges against him had been numerous; he had been accused of treason, of anti-leadership tendencies, of conspiring to spread famine, of, in short, every sin in the Soviet catechism.

In America, Papa George had applied for citizenship, had joined the labour movement, and had become, over seventeen years, a militant exponent of western culture. His books on Russia were classics of tough, straight thinking; his tracts on the philosophy of labour were read alike by union leaders and the men who ran the country's industries.

Inevitably, he had been asked by the governments of Western Europe to come and talk with their factory workers and industrialists. It was a dangerous job, but he had accepted without hesitation. He brought to Europe his eloquence, his tough, fighting mind, and most important, his first-hand experience as a man who had sat in the highest Councils of the Soviets.

He had done an impressive job. He had quoted Marxist dialectic and distortion to communist hecklers, and to the workers he had given blunt, ugly facts. Then he went to Liége to address a meeting—and disappeared.

It was increasingly obvious that his reappearance in Russia would be an issue of international significance. The recantings and self-slanders of revolutionaries in Eastern Europe was one thing; but it would be an altogether different matter if the Russians could announce that Papa George had deserted democracy for communism. It would be a double-barrelled charge; Eastern-European workers, made restless by rumours of American living standards, would infer from Papa George's return that the rumours were all calculated lies.

Western nations insisted that Papa George had been kidnapped, either with or by the young man with whom he had dined on the night he had disappeared. The communists held that Papa George had escaped from his American captors. Soon, they hinted, he will be in the sanctuary of the east, and will tell us of the things he was forced to do and say during his long imprisonment in America.

Mark finished his drink, depressed by the turn of his thoughts, and got to his feet.

"You're off?" Johnny said.

"That's right."

He glanced past Johnny and saw that the girl he had noticed before was looking about for a waiter. She had uncrossed her legs and was sitting very straight in her chair, her hands locked together in her lap. The air of casual relaxation was gone. There was an impatient line to her trim, hard body.

Mark shook hands with Johnny, who said, "Give them my regards, if you ever get down to Roanoke—" he stopped, and a

touch of colour appeared in his cheeks—" Forgive me, but I was almost ready to lapse into sentimentality. Terrible, eh? "

" I'll deliver any message you want," Mark said.

" Oh no, you won't," Johnny said, regarding him with a crooked little smile. " I've got no messages for Roanoke, or any other part of our big neurotic country. We'll leave it at good-bye."

Mark shook hands with the bar-tender, who wished him a speedy return to Italy, and then started for the stairs which led up to the main lobby. The girl stood as he passed her table and said something to him in a quiet, unhurried voice.

Mark hesitated, then stopped.

" Were you speaking to me? " he said.

" I asked if I could go upstairs with you," she said.

She was regarding him gravely, and he noticed, irrelevantly, that she was taller than he would have guessed: the top of her head was about even with his shoulders. Her eyes were deeply, clearly blue, and there was an efficient, composed expression on her face. She was about twenty-seven or -eight, he thought.

" Have we met before? " he asked.

" No, of course not," she said, and began to fumble in her purse. " Just let me take care of this check." She smiled into his eyes.

" I'd be a heel not to tell you I'm leaving Rome pretty soon," he said. " I've got time to walk upstairs, but that's all. All things considered, maybe you'd better have another drink."

He started to leave, but she put a hand on his arm, and said, " No, I'll go up with you, please."

" What is this? " he said, irritably. He glanced past her, down the length of the sombrely decorated lounge, and saw that the big man in the black overcoat had lowered his newspaper and was regarding him impassively. In the smoky gloom his rimless glasses shone like the headlights of a car on a dark road.

Johnny Dreyk was watching also, studying him with a small, insinuating smile.

The girl put a five-hundred-lira note on the table, and Mark saw the tremor in her fingers. The room was curiously still; the clink of glasses had ceased.

He said to the girl, " Look, if there's anything—"

But she cut him off quickly, " Let's go, shall we? "

" All right."

They went up the thickly carpeted steps, her hand resting lightly on his arm.

" What's the matter? " he said.

" It's nothing really."

" I don't believe you," he said.

" Well, that doesn't matter," she said, and took her hand from his arm.

The lobby of the hotel was large and elegantly appointed. Attendants in cardinal red livery and stiff white collars stood at the massive doors that led to the Via Veneto, and at the entrance

to the elaborate dining-room. Groups of tourists drifted past them, their voices gay, excited, or important in half a dozen languages.

She stopped in the middle of the lobby, and said, " Thanks, I'll get a cab now."

As she turned away, he had the feeling that she had never really seen him, and that if they met again she wouldn't recognize him. But then, before taking a step, she turned back to him and put her hand on his arm, and he felt her fingers trembling through the fabric of his jacket.

Looking past her he saw the head and shoulders of the man in the black overcoat rising slowly from the stairs that led to the lounge.

" Have you a room here? " she asked. Now her voice was hurried and nervous.

He nodded, watching the man in the black overcoat.

" Can I go up to your room with you? Please."

" I'll take care of this," he said, quietly.

" No, you don't understand. Won't you do what I ask? "

The man in the black overcoat had reached the top of the stairs, and was looking about at the groups of people in the lobby.

" All right," Mark said, and took her arm and led her towards the lifts. Something in her voice had jarred him; this wasn't the kind of trouble that could be handled bluntly and directly.

As the doors slid shut he realized that the man had seen them, and was moving after them with slow, measured strides.

The girl put her head back against the side of the lift and closed her eyes. " I'm sorry," she said.

There wasn't anything to say. Mark took out his cigarettes.

" Smoke? "

She started to accept one gratefully, but then her eyes went to the *No Smoking* sign and she shook her head.

" We can't smoke here."

" Go ahead, it doesn't matter."

But she shook her head again, and he lit his own cigarette, feeling oddly annoyed.

" Sometimes it does you good to break the law," he said.

They walked in silence to his room and he unlocked the door and snapped on the lights. His luggage was lined up in front of the couch, and his overcoat and camera were on top of it; the sight made him check the time. He still had half an hour.

" Who was that character? " he asked.

" It can't matter to you," she said.

" O.K." He gave her a cigarette and she accepted a light and inhaled deeply.

" I'm not trying to be rude," she said. " It just comes out that way."

" You're in trouble, aren't you? " he asked.

She was pacing the floor, taking short, quick puffs on her cigarette. The movements of her body were unconsciously fluid and graceful.

It would be almost impossible for her to do anything awkwardly, he thought. The turn of her head, the liquid swing of her long, beautifully moulded legs, even the way she smoked the cigarette—they all fitted into a composed, modish pattern.

"You're leaving Rome, aren't you?" she asked, ignoring his question.

"What are you doing in Italy?" he asked.

"I'm with the Ballet," she said. She spoke rapidly, as if she were relieved by this question. "We're in Milan this week, and I came down here because I'd never been to Rome."

"But you're an American?"

"Yes, of course. There are half a dozen of us with the Ballet."

"I see. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"I don't need any help."

He became annoyed with her.

"Look, I'm no child. You're in trouble. You sound bright, but maybe you don't know enough to yell for a cop. They've got lots of them here in Rome."

"There's no point in talking about it," she said.

"O.K., then." He sat down on the arm of the sofa. She continued pacing, and it was obvious from her frowning expression that she was absorbed in her own thoughts.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" he asked.

"I'd like to stay here for a while."

"O.K. I shan't be leaving for half an hour."

"Thanks." She looked at him and smiled slightly.

"Oh, you're quite welcome," he said. "You won't mind if I go into the bedroom and finish my packing?"

The smile left her lips. "I'm sorry I bothered you," she said, frowning now and rubbing her forehead with the tips of her fingers.

Abruptly, there was a measured knocking on the door. The sound was rather shocking in the silence.

She looked at him, and one hand moved slowly to her throat. "Please don't let him in," she pleaded.

Mark glanced at the door, then back at the girl. "Just relax," he said. He went over to her and took her arm. "Go into the bedroom and finish your cigarette. I'll take care of this now."

She hesitated an instant, staring into his eyes, seeing him for the first time. "All right," she said, and turned towards the bedroom. The sound of her small suede shoes was a whisper on the carpet, and then the door closed behind her softly, with a little click of finality.

Mark went to the door and opened it. The man in the black overcoat stood in the corridor, his hat in one hand, and a faint smile on his broad brown face.

"What do you want?" Mark said, in a hard, abrupt voice.

The man inclined his head slightly. "Your friend left these in the lounge," he said, and held out a pair of white kid gloves to Mark. "I tried to catch you before you came up to your room.

but you were in a hurry, it seemed." He spoke English well, with only a faint accent, and his voice was deep and resonant.

The anger drained out of Mark and he ran a hand through his hair. "Thanks very much," he said, after an awkward little silence. "She left them at her table, I guess."

"Yes, of course. Perhaps she would like to thank me also."

"All right, come in," Mark said.

"Thank you." The man entered the room, filling it with his bulk, his grave, heavy dignity.

Mark opened the bedroom door and said, "He just wanted to bring—" and then his voice trailed off as he stared about the empty room.

The window was open and a cool, dry breeze was blowing at the curtains, the heavy red draperies. He was aware without turning his head that the man in the black overcoat was behind him, and he was aware also of the quickened beat of his own heart.

Crossing to the window, he pulled the curtains aside, and saw the lacy ironwork of a fire-escape. He leaned out, supporting his weight with his hands on the sill, and looked up and down the iron stairs. There was no sign of the girl, but the window of the room directly below his was open.

He stared down at the Via Veneto, the broad and fashionable artery that twists through the tourist heart of Rome. The pavement cafés were crowded; Swiss and Scandinavian tourists, pink-cheeked, bundled in thick coats, were drinking beer, while the English sipped tea and the Americans drank coffee or cocktails.

The Embassy was on his left, set back among incongruous palm trees, and to his right, at the end of the street, stood a beautiful gate of the old Roman wall, glowing pink and beige in the late afternoon sunlight. Cars were flowing through it into the greenness of the Villa Borghese. But the girl was nowhere in sight.

Mark turned and looked at the man in the black overcoat. "Why was she afraid of you?" he said, keeping his voice even and quiet.

"I never saw her before. Why should she be afraid?"

"Let me ask the questions. What sort of trouble is she in?"

The man shrugged. "This makes no sense." He looked steadily at Mark, his large brown eyes glinting behind the rimless glasses. "Did she say she knew me?"

"No, she didn't," Mark said, after a short pause. His conviction was weakening; it was the girl, after all, who had behaved irrationally, not this big, composed man.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he said.

"I make nothing of it. I am sorry," the man answered. "I do not wish to become involved in things outside my own interests."

He bowed slightly and extended the gloves again to Mark. "Please take these, and if you see her, present them to her with my compliments. Good afternoon."

He left the room with the unhurried but decisive gait of a man removing himself permanently from an unpleasant situation.

Mark closed the door after him and began to pace the floor, running one hand through his short brown hair. Finally, he stared at the only tangible reminder of the girl—the white kid gloves.

They were of excellent quality, soft and smooth in his hands, scented delicately with cigarettes and cologne.

He paced his room, holding her gloves in his hands, strangely reluctant to call the desk and ask them to send up for his luggage.

He had the disturbing feeling that when he did that he'd be walking out on someone in trouble.

Johnny Dreyk was still at the bar in the lower lounge of the hotel. He was smiling at his fourth drink, enjoying his thoughts. The business of Mark and the dark-haired girl had been highly intriguing. Johnny sipped his drink, turning the situation about in his mind. Finally, he snapped his fingers and a waiter came to his side. Johnny smiled at him and took a thousand-lira note from his pocket.

" The man who was sitting there," he said, nodding at the empty table. " You know, big chap, glasses, black overcoat—do you know him? "

" No, signore."

" Very well. Go up to the desk and find out if he's registered here. Get his name, anything else you can. Quickly."

The waiter glanced at the bill in Johnny's hand.

" Subito, signore," he said, smiling.

Johnny ordered another drink, and by the time it was mixed the waiter was back at his side.

" He is registered, signore," he said. " His name is Marioff. He is from Athens, a Greek, that is, and in the coffee business."

" That's not what I wanted to know," Johnny said, and gave the man a hundred-lira note. He put the thousand-lira note back in his pocket, and raised the drink to his lips, ignoring the waiter's resentful stare. Marioff, a Greek in the coffee trade. That meant nothing, but Johnny wasn't discouraged. He intended to dig a bit more. This was not just a pastime with him, it was very nearly a passion. Johnny liked intrigue for its own sake; that was one of the reasons he had allied himself with the communists. There were other reasons, of course, connected with his family in Virginia and his school-days, but he didn't think they were important reasons. No, his family and friends had given him a series of stings and bruises, true enough, but these had been assuaged by his political revolt. They were shocked by what he thought and wrote, which was excellent.

Johnny knew he deceived himself about communism to some extent. He wasn't a sympathetic person bleeding for the world's injustices. True, he could be intellectually moved by the starving millions located conveniently in another hemisphere but he was bored by the problems of the man who served his drinks or shined his shoes. However, he did believe that communism was the world's best hope and working with it gave him a powerful feeling of

importance. More significantly, his connection with such a noble mission removed from him all moral constraints.

Frowning, he went back to his problem, and a few seconds later he saw the man in the black overcoat re-enter the lounge and walk to his table. Johnny learnt nothing from the man's expression; it was as unrevealing as a pool of deep water.

The big Greek, Marioff, was glancing at him, he realized, with a friendly expression on his face. This was much better. Johnny smiled at him, raised his glass.

"We're in luck with the weather today," he said.

"Yes, it is quite perfect." Marioff smiled, revealing a gold-capped tooth in the centre of his mouth. "Would you care to join me for a drink? It would be my pleasure."

"I'd be delighted." Johnny left the bar and sat down at Marioff's table, putting an ingenuous smile on his face.

"Name's Johnny Dreyk," he said.

They shook hands; Marioff's grip was impressive and Johnny retrieved his fingers gratefully. Why did these big men always show off that way? Slightly annoyed, he changed his tactics.

"What happened to the girl?" he asked, smiling pleasantly. "I saw her pick up my friend, and watched you follow them out. Quite an intriguing tableau, really."

The frontal attack didn't jar Marioff. "I noticed that she forgot her gloves and I returned them to her," he said.

"Well, well. You found her then?"

"You have a curious interest in my business."

Johnny grinned. "On the contrary, I have none at all. Your business is coffee, and I despise the stuff."

"You have an inquiring manner, Mr. Dreyk," Marioff said slowly.

Johnny continued to smile, but the change in Marioff's eyes affected him oddly; his heart was beating faster and he found it difficult to keep his smile steady. "I'm a newspaper man, and it's my business to know what's going on," he said.

"Oh, yes." Marioff nodded slightly. He paused to sip his drink. "I am curious about your friend. His bags are packed. Is he leaving Rome?"

"You were in his room, then. Was the girl there?"

Marioff stared at him thoughtfully.

"What kind of person is he?"

"Mark? Why do you want to know?"

"I want you to help me, Mr. Dreyk. On a business basis. Does that interest you?"

"Not if it concerns coffee. Tell me more."

"When I took the young woman's gloves to your friend's room, he told me a very peculiar story. While he answered my knock, he said that she had climbed onto the fire-escape and vanished."

Johnny began to laugh.

"What a terrible thing to happen to poor old Mark. But I like it. It's got a fine, Orient-Express flavour to it."

" I would prefer that your friend leaves Rome as he has planned."

" What's to stop him? "

" Is he likely to stay and probe into this business? "

" I don't know," Johnny said, frowning. " Mark's pretty impulsive. Maybe he'll feel he's got to help her. What sort of trouble is she in, by the way? "

" She is in no trouble that I know of," Marioff said.

Johnny found this additionally intriguing.

" Well, what do you want me to do? "

" Perhaps you could make sure that he goes," Marioff said. " I leave the exact approach to your obvious ingenuity."

" O.K., I'll make sure he takes that plane," Johnny said. " This is on a business basis, you said? "

" Yes. I assure you that—"

" We'll talk terms later," Johnny said. " Actually, I didn't need the fiscal bait. I'd do it for fun."

" This is not so light a matter as you think."

" I'll be the judge of that," Johnny said, smiling. " I'll go up and prod Mark into the wide blue, yonder. Then you and I shall have a talk. Don't drift away," he said, still smiling into Marioff's eyes. " Don't make me look for you."

" You will find me," Marioff said, and as Johnny sauntered from the lounge, he raised his drink and said in a low, amused voice, " From now on you will always find me, my friend."

Mark was pacing the floor, smoking what he'd told himself would be a last cigarette, when the knock sounded on the door. Maybe she's come back, he thought, and as he crossed the room, wondered why that prospect should make him so unreasonably happy.

Johnny Dreyk was standing in the doorway, a cigarette in his mouth. " Well, don't look so disappointed," he said, strolling into the room. " What were you expecting? Something in a black négligé? "

" Oh, shut up," Mark said.

" Fine thing," Johnny said, seating himself on the arm of a chair. " I come up to bid a last adieu, and get greeted with churlish snarls." He grinned at Mark. " Where's the little item who picked you up in the lounge? "

" She's gone."

" Up in smoke? "

" Don't be funny about it," Mark said, and there was a sharp edge on his voice.

" O.K., O.K.," Johnny said mildly. " What's wrong? You look upset."

Mark ran a hand through his hair.

" I'm worried about her," he said. " Listen to this, and see if it makes any kind of sense. She came up here with me, obviously frightened by that big man in the lounge. Do you remember him? He wore glasses and a black overcoat."

" Sure, he's a Greek. In the coffee business."

" You know him then? " Mark said slowly.

" I've met him a couple of times. He comes to Rome twice a year. In the summer, he brings his family. He's got a flock of children, four large, untidy girls, to be exact, who spend their time in the cafés eating huge plates of ice-cream. Mrs. Marioff is a tired-looking little woman with moles on her face."

Mark lit another cigarette, slightly relieved. This sketch of Marioff was comforting; a business man with four daughters was hardly a believable figure of melodrama.

" Did you ever see that girl before? " he asked.

" No, but the type is common enough," Johnny said. " Why? "

Mark told him what had happened, and when he finished, Johnny said, " Well, I agree, it's a pretty puzzle. Maybe Marioff stared at her and she got alarmed. Female tourists read too many books about decadent Europeans, I think. Then, when she overheard why he'd followed her, she was too embarrassed to face you and him and admit that she'd behaved like a ninny. Another possibility is that she's that annoying American type, the madcap." He glanced casually at his watch. " You'd better get someone up for your luggage."

" I've still got five or ten minutes." He frowned. " The window below my bedroom was open. I went down to the next floor and tried the door, but it's locked. That's normal, though. It would have latched when she closed it."

" Now look, old chap—"

" She was frightened, I tell you."

" Hell, this girl is in a city crawling with cops and American officials. What could happen to her more serious than getting a run in her stocking? " He stood, smiling, and snapped his fingers. " Tell you what I'll do to ease your Puritan conscience. I'll look her up and see if she needs any help."

" You're not kidding? "

" Certainly not. I'm always available to help Americans, if they're beautiful and wealthy."

" I'm serious, Johnny."

" So am I."

Mark hesitated a few seconds, went to the phone, and told the clerk to send someone up for his luggage. Then he took out his wallet and removed fifty thousand lire, which he'd planned to convert through his office in New York.

" What's that for? " Johnny asked, as Mark handed him the money.

" You might run into some expenses in finding her."

" I'll make a point of it," Johnny smiled. " Now come on, let's go."

They waited under the arched entrance of the hotel while the commissionaire waved imperiously for a cab. The weather had changed; rain was falling now, a soft heavy rain that was almost purple in the twilight shadows.

I'm really on my way home, Mark thought, trying to recapture the pleasant, mildly nostalgic mood he had enjoyed in the bar. He had known and liked this city. The soft brown colours of the old walls, pink and mauve in certain lights, the crooked little streets in Trastevere, the spontaneous warmth and good humour of the people, that was his now, a part of him for ever. It was a comfortable, friendly city to say good-bye to, but he didn't feel quite comfortable as he stood beside Johnny and watched the purple rain coming down in slow heavy waves on the Via Veneto.

" If she's in some kind of trouble tell her to go to the Embassy."

" Of course," Johnny said.

The blue-aproned porters finished loading his luggage into the cab. He tipped them and they grinned and touched their hats, with blunt, strong fingers.

" Well, you'd better get moving," Johnny said.

" Sure." They shook hands and Mark climbed into the cab. Johnny shouted directions to the driver, and the cab moved out from the archway, honking demandingly as it turned into the traffic on the Via Veneto. Mark looked out of the rear window and saw Johnny waving to him, and through the rain and shadows he could see the grin on his lean, cynical face.

Johnny was still grinning when he returned to the lounge, crowded now with people driven inside by the rain, and sat down at Marioff's table.

" Mission accomplished," he said, waving to a waiter. " He's on his way, full of guilt and gloom, but definitely on his way."

" Do you think you could find that girl? "

" Probably. She's at some hotel in the city. A good one, I'd guess, from her clothes."

" I want to talk to her tonight," Marioff said.

" Will she like that? "

" I think so. You find her and tell her I wish to talk to her."

Johnny smiled. " That may be good enough for her, but it's not good enough for me. I'm through with prowling around in the dark. I'm afraid of the dark, as a matter of fact. Let's turn on some lights. First, who are you ?"

" That isn't important."

" To me, it is."

" We can safely leave it until another time, I think."

Johnny frowned. " I could start guessing. Would you like that? "

Marioff leaned forward slightly, his face hardening. " Don't do that, Mr. Dreyk. Do you understand? "

Johnny experienced a sudden, rather pleasurable sense of fear as he met Marioff's gaze. This is something big, he thought, excited and amazed by his luck. He knew the signs of power, and he saw them now in Marioff's clear, hard eyes, and in the blunt strength of his face. Johnny wasn't afraid of force; he had toyed with the forces shaking Europe for eight years and he knew the arts of safety.

Now, he sensed intuitively that smash-ups were coming, and he wanted to make sure he had a safe seat for the show.

"I'll hobble my curiosity for the moment," he said, with an easy little smile. "You want the girl, first, eh? What shall I tell her when I find her?"

"The name Marioff wouldn't mean anything to her, so just describe me to her, and tell her that I have good news. That will be enough, I think."

Mark Rayburn's plane was grounded at Milan, and the pilot announced that there might be a delay of several hours. It was dark now and a steamy fog rolled over the field, putting yellow coronas about the parallel rows of landing-lights. Mark took a cab into the city for dinner, and on the way tried to shake off his gloomy mood.

After dinner and a bottle of Valpolicella, he walked through the dark streets to take a look at Milan's famous cathedral. It loomed at the end of a piazza which wasn't big enough to set it off properly, its spires losing themselves in the night. The scholars said it was bad Gothic, too tricky and ornamented, but Mark thought it was tremendous.

He strolled round to the back and studied the immense rectangular stained-glass windows on each side of the apse, and then went through the church and out of the massive main doors. By then he was shivering. The dampness and cold of the cathedral were centuries old.

What was she thinking about, he wondered, and he knew then that she hadn't been out of his mind. The cathedral, with what was or wasn't good Gothic, was all a smoke-screen. He lit another cigarette and that reminded him of her again. Why should that bring her back so clearly? Then he remembered; she hadn't lit a cigarette in the lift. She'd obeyed the law, even though she'd needed a cigarette badly. The implications of that worried him; she was no irresponsible madcap, who'd sneak down the fire-escape from a man's room for a lark. That sort of giddiness was inconceivable in a person who obeyed such simple rules as not smoking in lifts.

It was a tiny thing, but tiny things were revealing. The fact that a man never allowed himself a third drink was a tiny thing—but it told you a great deal about the man.

Mark headed for a cab-rank at the end of the piazza, walking faster now, and frowning. She wouldn't have behaved as she had unless the pressure and fear had been genuine. And he'd walked out on her. Now he'd have to cancel his trip, get his luggage on a Rome flight, but none of this worried him as much as the thought of her trembling fingers.

He climbed into a cab and told the driver to hurry.

Mark arrived at Ciampino Airport in Rome at nine o'clock, and walked into the bright, crowded lobby of the Ariosto before ten. The desk clerk smiled at him in surprise.

" There was a wire in Milan changing my plans," Mark said.

" That is a pity. You will need a room? "

" Yes, please. Ask one of the boys to take my luggage up. I'll register later. Have you seen Mr. Dreyk around? "

" Yes, he's in the dining-room now, I think."

Mark crossed the lobby and went up a flight of heavily carpeted stairs to the entrance of the dining-room. The orchestra was playing a plaintive French song, and waiters in full dress moved about with the grace of dancers. Light sparkled down from ornate chandeliers, and broke in gleaming splinters on shining silver and crystal. There was a cheerful hum of conversation, occasionally raised and brightened by laughter.

Mark glanced about the busy, crowded room, and then he saw them, three people sitting at a corner table, obviously enjoying themselves.

With the first jar of recognition he felt a little sick, and then, after that, he was conscious of nothing but bitter, empty anger.

The girl was sitting between Johnny Dreyk and the big solemn Greek, Marioff. There was wine in a silver bucket beside them, and a centrepiece of bright flowers on the table. Johnny was telling them something, gesturing humorously, and Marioff was nodding gravely, a little smile on his lips.

The girl was smiling, too.

Mark stared at them until he became aware that someone was standing at his side. He turned and the headwaiter said, " Will you be alone, Mr. Rayburn? "

" No, no, thanks, I've eaten," Mark said, and walked down the stairs to the lobby. He went slowly towards the desk, unconscious of the bustle around him, thinking: it was a prank, then, just a lark she could laugh about with her friends.

He hesitated at the desk, frowning. Then he told the clerk to get him a reservation on tomorrow's flight to New York. Her little joke had cost him twenty-four hours. And all he'd get out of it was an apology. But he intended to get that much. He took a pen and a sheet of hotel stationery, and wrote a brief note, asking her to meet him downstairs at the American bar in ten minutes. Then another thought occurred to him.

He went over to the commissionaire, who was resplendent in a cardinal red uniform, and said, " I'd like you to do me a favour." He described her as well as he could, while the commissionaire nodded thoughtfully.

" Will you find out where she goes, please? " Mark said. " She'll tell the cab driver, probably."

" But, of course," the commissionaire said, obviously liking this very much. " I will get the address, do not worry."

Mark returned his smile and handed him a tip. Then he gave the note to an attendant and told him to deliver it to the girl in person. When the man disappeared into the dining-room, Mark went downstairs to the lounge and found a seat at the bar.

After twenty minutes, he knew she wasn't coming. It was ten o'clock now and the lounge was almost empty. Mark paid his bill and walked upstairs to the lobby, aware that most of his anger had faded; he was now irritated with himself for having taken the affair so grimly.

The commissionaire waved to him as he came into the lobby, and smiled broadly. " She left immediately after you went downstairs to the lounge," he said. " She has gone to the Hotel Wilson. I heard her direct the driver."

Mark thanked him again and turned away, lighting a cigarette. Then, looking towards the dining-room, he saw Johnny and Marioff coming through the doors.

Mark strolled across the lobby and met them as they came down the stairs.

Johnny grinned and threw up his hands in mock dismay.

" I simply *don't* believe it," he said. " When I saw your note I decided that someone was using steady old Mark's name. What's happened? "

" My company caught me in Milan," Mark said. " There's a loose end they want me to tie up here."

" How unfortunate. You've met Mr. Marioff, I believe? "

" Not quite," Mark said. " We just discussed a little mystery, anonymously." He glanced at Marioff. " I'm Mark Rayburn." They shook hands, and he felt the strength in the Greek's big, hard fingers.

" This is a pleasure," Marioff said, smiling slightly.

Mark increased the pressure of his grip until a harder line appeared about the Greek's mouth. When he took his hand back Marioff's smile had changed. He was studying Mark with his big head tilted a little to one side, a hint of humour in his large, brown eyes.

" It is a pity your plans were upset," he said.

" Well, it's not too bad," Mark replied.

Marioff's smile was good-humoured. " That is a comforting philosophy. But disorder irritates me, I am afraid."

The conversation meant nothing, Mark realized. Marioff was analysing him for some reason, measuring him for an appropriate pigeon-hole, and the words served only as a delaying action for his appraisal.

Usually, Mark was a fair judge of men. But he could reach no conclusion on Marioff. The man was assessing him as if he were a side of beef or an engine part, something whose functions and value could be determined at a glance. Unconsciously Mark straightened his shoulders. He had been an Infantry Sergeant in Patton's army, and he had bossed gangs of oil workers in Texas, South America, and Italy. Without foolish pride, he had always felt equal to whatever he might run into; but now he wasn't sure. There was something in Marioff's massive, impenetrable façade that made him doubt himself, that made his squared shoulders seem like the shaky props of a child encountering the school bully.

Then Marioff's smile altered, became polite and impersonal, and the tension dissolved.

Johnny was smiling at him thoughtfully, puzzled by the subtle conflict between the two men. " Well, I found your mysterious disappearing female," he said.

" Yes, I saw her in the dining-room," Mark said. " What was it all about? "

" I was right, of course," Johnny said, in a pleased voice. " She had been frightened by this ogre, Marioff, who, she thought, was staring at her with flaming passion in his eye. And so she clutched at you. Dashed off to your room in a funk." He smiled cheerfully. " When she overheard the reason for Marioff's pursuit, she was too embarrassed to face either of you, and vanished down the fire-escape." He spread his hands. " And so ends what promised to be one of the Ariosto's more titillating mysteries."

" How did you find her? " Mark asked.

" She was in the rear lobby, expiring of mortification. Her name, by the way, is Amanda Warren. I persuaded her to have dinner with us, which she did, although her mood was too contrite to allow her to enjoy herself."

" What was her reaction to my note? " Mark said.

" That embarrassed her hugely. She begged me to apologize to you, and then left."

" Where did she go? "

" She was catching the train for Florence."

" I see." Mark tried to keep anything from showing in his face. " What time was her train? "

Johnny looked at his watch.

" Well, with luck, she just about made it."

Johnny eyed Mark grinning. " You know, for a second, I thought you'd come back on her account."

" Hardly," Mark said. " Well—" he paused to mark a transition, then said—" I think I'll take a walk before turning in."

" That is an after-dinner habit of mine, also," Marioff said. " Are you to be in Rome for several days? "

" No, just until tomorrow."

" I thought we might have a drink and a talk. But this is good-bye, it seems."

" I'm afraid so," Mark said. They shook hands all round, smiling, and Mark left the lobby. He walked a block, then caught a cab and told the driver to take him to the Hotel Wilson.

In the Ariosto lobby, Johnny nudged Marioff. " Cleverly handled, if I say so myself," he said; and laughed.

Marioff studied Johnny with some distaste.

" Your friend is no idiot."

" Mark? He's a steady, unimaginative simpleton."

Marioff said drily, " You know nothing of men. Your friend has strength in him, and you'd realize that if you stopped chattering long enough to look into his eyes."

" You needn't get abusive about it," Johnny said, colouring. " I can walk out of this—"

Marioff took his arm in a big powerful hand, and something in the gesture cut Johnny's words off abruptly. " Come with me, and I will show you he is no fool," Marioff said.

He strolled towards the commissionaire, still holding Johnny's arm, but smiling now.

" You may assist us, perhaps," he said, taking a thousand-lira note from his pocket and rolling it into a slim cylinder between his fingers.

The man bowed sharply. " Yes, of course."

" My American friends are engaged in an intrigue, I suspect. You can confirm my suspicions, perhaps," he said, with a droll tilt of his big head. " Now tell me this: did my other American friend, Mr. Rayburn, ask you to find out where a certain American girl was staying? "

The commissionaire rolled his eyes and laughed.

" Ah, then, he did! " Marioff said, and nudged Johnny in the ribs. " You see, I know more of these matters than you little boys."

" I have admitted nothing," the man said, grinning and winking at Marioff.

" Of course not. You have been most discreet," Marioff said, and slipped him the thousand-lira note. Still holding Johnny's arm, he strolled back to the middle of the lobby. " He didn't believe you, of course," he said, quietly. " I saw that in his eyes. You must phone her, tell her to get rid of him, to do nothing to encourage his interference. Quickly, you fool! " he said, and the tone of his voice brought another flush of colour to Johnny's face.

" Very well," he said, and strode towards the phones, his shoulders held at a stiff, injured angle. Marioff paced the lobby, unwrapping a cigar with blunt, heavy fingers. He glanced at two big men in black suits, who sat together on the sofa, and they rose and came to his side. Marioff put the cigar in his mouth and one of them supplied him with a light. Turning his back to them, he puffed on the cigar until it was drawing well; his eyes were fixed on Johnny Dreyk in the phone box.

Johnny left the phone a few seconds later, his expression still sullen and irritable. " She'll get rid of him," he said. " I'm going home now. Quite frankly, I'm bored. I'll expect to see you in the morning."

" You had better come up to my room," Marioff said. " I think as a matter of fact you had better stay with us here for a few days. We have much to discuss."

The lure was exciting but Johnny was in a bad humour. Marioff's contempt had bitten deeply into his confidence.

" No, thank you, I'm comfortable where I am," he said. " I'll be available when you wish to talk. But mysteries bore me, frankly."

" We will talk now," Marioff said, and at the words the two big men in black suits moved round him and took up positions at Johnny's sides.

" My colleagues," Marioff said. " Shall we go upstairs now? "

Johnny glanced at the men, rubbing his cheek. The one on his left was short, but powerfully built, with blank, animal-like eyes. The other man was taller, with great stooping shoulders, and long wide jaw.

" Anton and Gregor," Marioff said. " You will find them good, reliable friends."

" I don't doubt it," Johnny said drily. He wasn't afraid; this was force, of course, but he knew how to keep from being hurt. Also, the familiar perverse excitement was stealing through him, as he sensed the closeness of danger and violence.

" There's a newspaper article in my apartment I've got to mail," he said, not wanting to capitulate too cheaply.

" Give me the keys of your flat," Marioff said. " Gregor will fetch what you need."

" Well, all right," Johnny said, shrugging.

Gregor was the tall man with the wide jaw. He took the keys from Johnny and said, " What do you want? " in careful, sluggish English.

" On the typewriter you'll see some pages of copy. That's all I'll need tonight."

" And your address? "

Johnny told him, and Gregor repeated it to himself, his thick, dry lips moving slowly.

" Now, we shall go up," Marioff said.

Anton took Johnny's arm and the three men walked towards the lifts. Johnny tried to smile at Marioff's remark, but his lips were trembling slightly, and it was a shaky effort.

Mark paced the empty, softly lighted lobby of the Wilson, waiting for the girl. He had phoned her from the desk, and she had said she would come down. Her voice and manner had been casual, and that put him on the offensive; he felt now that he was thrusting himself in where he obviously wasn't wanted. But he didn't care; he knew from Johnny's lie that something was wrong.

The lift doors opened and she came across the lobby to him, smiling unselfconsciously. She walked quickly and gracefully, with a light, lovely stride, and there was no trace of embarrassment in her manner.

They shook hands, and she said, " You must think I'm an absolute fool. Now don't be kind about it. I was an absolute fool." She was looking up at him, still smiling.

" Johnny told me you'd gone to Florence," he said.

" I told him to tell you that," she said quickly.

She wasn't truly beautiful, he realized. Her features were fine, but there was too much strength and composure in her square, elegant face. Also, she wasn't a very good liar.

" I was too embarrassed to face you," she said.

" You shouldn't have been so sensitive." It was all too pat, everything fitted together too smoothly, he thought.

"Your name is Amanda Warren, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Amanda Warren."

He hesitated a second, adjusting to that, and then he said, "What are you afraid of?"

"I was afraid of that man. He stared at me, and I became nervous."

"Oh, stop it," he said, irritably. "Is that your usual reaction when a man looks at you?"

"There's obviously no point in discussing it," she said. "If you won't believe me, you won't."

"I won't believe a lot of nonsense. Why did Johnny tell me you'd gone to Florence? Why didn't he want me to see you?"

"*I* didn't want to see you," she said. "Johnny Dreyk had nothing to do with it."

"If you've got to lie, why can't you come out with something plausible?"

She was angry now but not with him, he guessed. It was having to lie that made her furious.

"Why do you care, anyway?" she demanded.

"You asked for help this afternoon. You needed it, too. I walked out on you, so I came back."

"But you were on your way home," she said, in a slightly altered voice. "Did you change your plans because you thought I was in trouble?"

"I did," he said.

"Well, I must admit you have a strong sense of chivalry," she said drily. Then she looked up at him and smiled. "That wasn't a nice thing to say. I'm sorry I caused you all this trouble. I can understand how irritated you must be, and I'm truly sorry."

She hesitated then, smiling at him, studying his hard closed face. When his expression didn't change, she shrugged slightly. "If you will be angry about it, then you will, I suppose," she said. "I must go up now. Good night."

She turned away but he caught her wrist and pulled her round to face him. "That's not good enough," he said.

"Let me go." She attempted to twist free but his hand was like a vice on her slim wrist.

"Tell me something that makes sense," he said, tightening his grip. There was a coldness about her, a lady-to-the-peasant aloofness that he wanted to destroy. The need was perverse and illogical; he had never deliberately hurt anyone in his life, but he was willing to hurt this girl.

She stood perfectly still, watching him, without expression.

"Does this please you?" she said, at last.

"Are you going to be honest with me?"

She glanced away from him and saw the desk clerk was watching.

"Do you enjoy making scenes?" she inquired coldly.

"You asked me to come into this business," he said. He released her, and was ashamed of himself when he saw the angry marks of his fingers on her wrist.

The clerk still watched them, a disapproving frown on his face, and she said, " Let's go outside."

" You'll need a wrap."

" No, it doesn't matter."

They left the hotel, to the desk clerk's obvious relief, and hesitated a few seconds under the canopy. The rain had stopped and the air was fresh and cold. There was a Renault parked across from them, and behind the windscreen Mark saw the pale, triangular blur of a man's face, pin-pointed with the tip of a glowing cigarette.

The Wilson was built on a hill, near the Church of the Trinity, and overlooked Piazza di Spagna, and the Spanish Stairs. They walked up the dark pavement to the right, and stopped in the shadow of the Egyptian obelisk at the top of the Spanish Stairs. The broad, graceful steps flowed down to the boat-shaped Bernini fountain in the middle of Piazza di Spagna. Glowing softly, dotted with church domes, the city spread before them in the moonlight.

Mark heard a car door slam, and the sound of a man's heels on the pavement. He glanced down the street and saw a short, squat figure coming in their direction. The man spat a cigarette from his mouth, and the flaming tip drew a vivid parabola against the darkness.

Mark watched the man coming up the street. He was the one from the parked Renault, he thought.

" Let's go down the steps," he said.

" We can talk here, although there's nothing to say," she said.

When the man was about fifty yards away from them, he turned out of sight into a doorway.

" All right," Mark said, and took out his cigarettes. " Smoke? "

" Yes, thanks."

" That's why I came back, you know," he said.

She glanced at him, frowning slightly. In the moonlight, the clean fine planes of her face were altered and softened.

" What do you mean? " she asked.

" You wouldn't smoke in the lift, remember? Because the sign said no smoking." He hesitated; it seemed a silly thing now. " I decided you weren't the type who'd behave foolishly."

" You were drawing an awfully long inference," she said drily. She smoked for a moment, then threw the cigarette away. " For some reason you're worrying about me," she said. " I don't understand it, because it can't mean anything to you one way or the other. But let me say this: I'm not in any trouble or danger. But someone close to me is. To help him I've got to do as I'm told. You can help me by taking the next plane out of Rome, and forgetting this business. Will you do that? "

" Who's Marioff? " he asked.

" I'm not going to tell you anything more. Good night," she said, shortly.

He let her take two or three steps before saying, " Just a minute, Amanda."

She turned back impatiently. "What is it?"

"There's a man watching us," he said. "He was in that Renault parked opposite the hotel. Now he's in a doorway down the street. Any idea who he might be?"

She came closer to him, the click of her high heels the only sound in the stillness. "Are you sure?"

"Pretty sure. I'd better walk back with you."

She hesitated, then shrugged. "It doesn't make any difference."

"I hope you're as tough as you think you are," he said.

They walked to her hotel without speaking. Mark saw the man on the opposite side of the street, but only as a wide shadow in the darkness of a doorway. Inside the dim lobby she faced him, and said, "I'm grateful you wanted to help me, or have I said that?"

"No, you haven't."

A touch of colour came into her pale face. "I'm not very good at saying thank you." She put out her hand. "Good night."

They shook hands and he watched her slim, straight back as she went quickly to the lifts. As the door closed behind her he stood for a few seconds rubbing his jaw. Then he walked out to the street.

The Renault was gone.

Mark waved for a cab and gave the driver Johnny Dreyk's address; then he settled back and lit a cigarette.

Johnny Dreyk lived near the Piazza Argentina, in an elegant old palazzo which had once housed a lesser Borgia and his retainers. It was a huge pile of black stone, boxed in now by the business district which had grown up around it; the main floor was used as a warehouse, and the upper floors had been partitioned into small apartments. Johnny lived in the pent-house with a terrace that overlooked the heart of ancient Rome.

Mark dropped the brass knocker twice and waited in the cold, draughty hallway, smelling the dampness, and the sharp tang of garlic in the air. Light footsteps sounded inside the apartment and the door was opened quickly.

The girl who looked up at him was obviously expecting someone else; she made no attempt to conceal her disappointment. "What do you want?" she said in a husky, petulant voice.

"I'd like to see Johnny."

"So would I. Do you want to come in?"

"Yes, thanks. You're expecting him?"

She smiled cynically. "I've been expecting him for several hours."

He followed her into a long salon, whose windows looked out on the elaborate, starkly white memorial of Victor Emmanuel; the wedding-cake, Romans called it. The memorial faced the Piazza Venezia, where Italians had once gathered to hear Mussolini's trumpetings. Beyond it stretched the Roman Forum, and then the incredible bulk of the Colosseum, glowing under its barrage of electric lights.

The room was like Johnny, Mark thought, glancing around; a hodge-podge of old and modern art, good furniture and bad, and a collection of books and statuary which had, if nothing else, a certain shock value. The flavour of the place was impious and iconoclastic, but it was all off key, a little phoney, he thought.

He knew the girl's name was Maria; she had been Johnny's mistress for several years. He had met her here but she obviously didn't remember him.

She glanced at her wrist-watch. "He must be along pretty soon."

She was an elegant little creature, barely out of her teens, with close-cropped, reddish-brown hair, and a small, exquisitely shaped head. Her skin was fine and pale, but in spite of her fragile appearance there was an urchin quality about her, and an air of cynicism that would have suited someone twice her age.

She wore black velvet toreador trousers, laced below her knees, a white silk blouse, and leather thong sandals on her bare feet. From Trastevere, he guessed, a product of Rome's hell's kitchen. That perfect little head and body had probably saved her from a lifetime of drudgery. But was she much better off with Johnny, he wondered.

"Are you worried about him?" he asked.

She answered too quickly. "No, of course not. He is late, that is all."

"When did you expect him?"

"For dinner."

"It's almost eleven now."

"I know the time," she said, and lit another cigarette with an impatient gesture. Then she looked at him, frowning slightly. "You're an American, aren't you?"

"That's right."

She put her hands on her flat, narrow hips. "I don't like Americans," she said. "Why don't you all go home?"

"Don't worry, I'm going home."

"That is fine. I live here with Johnny. That shocks you, eh?"

"Why should it?"

She grinned at him, the cigarette hanging from her lip. "We are not married."

"I don't see that it's any of my business," Mark said, a bit wearily. She'd picked up Johnny's approach, he thought. Attack and shock. Neither she nor Johnny had the stamina to live normally, so they made a virtue of hysteria.

It was far from funny, but he smiled anyway. There was something pathetic and silly about this exquisite little creature and her bitter, garbled ideas.

They waited in silence after that, while she paced the floor, lighting one cigarette from the tip of another, and glancing at her watch every moment or so. Mark strolled across the room and looked out of the windows.

A key sounded in the door and the girl wheeled with a little

sound of pleasure and ran across the floor. The door opened and a tall man in a dark suit entered. Maria stopped as if she'd run into a stone wall, and stared at him in astonishment.

" Who are you? What do you want here? "

The man looked down at her without interest. " I must take some things to Johnny," he said, pronouncing the name Joan-ay. His voice was grave and deep, his English stiff. He glanced about, ignoring Mark.

" Where is Johnny? " Maria said, her voice rising sharply.

" I think he will phone you tomorrow," the man said. " It is all right. He gave me his key, yes? " Smiling briefly, he moved with slow, heavy steps to the desk and picked up some sheets of copy that rested on the typewriter.

Mark studied the man, frowning. He'd seen him before, but where? Then he remembered. The Ariosto Hotel, of course. He'd been sitting with another man, and both of them had looked slightly out of place in the gilt splendour of the lobby. Now this one seemed impervious to his present surroundings; his broad, heavy face was impassive as he turned and walked back across the room. He was broader and taller than Mark, with thick sloping shoulders, and long arms and legs that seemed able at any instant to move with speed and power.

Maria stepped in front of him as he approached the door.

" You can't take those papers," she said. " Where is Johnny? "

The man sighed deeply. " He is busy. He will phone."

" I want to know where he is."

" Please stand to the side."

Maria shook her tiny fist in his face and began to swear, fluently and passionately, in the scorching idiom of the streets. The man shrugged and with one hand moved her out of his way as easily as he would have brushed aside a curtain.

Maria clawed at his free arm like a cat, trying to turn him about and pull him back into the room.

Mark was moving towards them when the man muttered something in a foreign language, and slapped her viciously across the face. The sound of the blow was sickeningly loud in the silence. Maria was spun round in a full circle by its impact, and then she fell and twisted onto her side. There was a flaming red mark on her cheek, and a welling smear of blood on her lips. She shook her head slowly, crying in a gasping, frightened way.

Mark was moving faster then, his hands low at his sides. " Try that on me," he said. Now he wanted to hit something; a wall would have done at a pinch, but this big hoodlum was a far better target.

The man faced Mark, his eyes still and watchful, and said, " Do not interfere."

Mark didn't answer. He moved in, his fists coming up. Then the man's eyes changed. He stepped backwards and dug a hand into his pocket. He brought out a revolver and pointed it at Mark's stomach. The muzzle was steady as something held in a vice.

" Now stop," he said.

Mark was in mid-stride when he saw the gun. He brought his foot to the floor slowly, carefully, and he didn't move after that, not even to lower his hands or unclench his fists. The man's eyes, cold and flat now, told him the gun was not for effect; he was ready to shoot.

A few seconds passed. The man studied Mark, as if committing him to memory. Then he nodded slowly and opened the door.

" You stay here," he said.

Mark watched him back out of the open door and pull it shut behind him; he didn't move until he heard his heavy footsteps going down the stairs. Then he turned and knelt beside Maria. She was crying softly, and trembling like a badly frightened child.

He lifted her in his arms and put her on the couch, and then got a damp sponge from the bathroom and wiped some of the blood from her lips.

She twisted away from him and said, petulantly, " Let me alone, I am all right." Her small, classically moulded head rested on a black silk cushion, and against that her skin was startlingly white. She had stopped crying, and there was only an occasional tremor in her breathing. " I don't need any help from you," she said.

" You didn't get much," Mark said drily.

" Give me a cigarette."

He gave her one and lit it. She inhaled deeply, then winced, and swore as the paper stuck to her cut lip. " That animal," she said, gesturing angrily at the door. She sat up and pushed at Mark's shoulder. " Get out of the way, I am all right."

She got to her feet and rubbed her delicate jaw. " Men have struck me before," she said, in the manner of a boasting child. " If it amuses them, what difference does it make? "

" That's a generous attitude," he said. Then he looked at his watch. " Well, I'll be going. Johnny won't be along tonight."

When he opened the door, she said, " Wait, please," in a changed voice. He glanced over his shoulder, his hand on the knob. " Well, what is it? "

She came towards him slowly, her fragile little body looking lost and lonely in the big cluttered room.

" Johnny's in trouble, isn't he? " she said.

" He wouldn't do this if he weren't in some trouble." The mocking cynicism was gone from her face; her eyes were frightened and vulnerable. " I know him, you see. He's like a child sometimes, but he loves me. He wouldn't worry me like this if he could help it."

" You didn't know that man who was here? "

" I never saw him before."

" He wasn't an Italian? "

" No, he swore at me in Polish. I know something of that language. There were Polish soldiers here in the war."

Mark hesitated. The only Poles who could leave Poland were

those trusted by the communists. How did this one fit in with Johnny, and with Marioff, a Greek coffee merchant? "Well, I'll call in the morning," he said. "Johnny will probably be in by then."

"All right, I'll tell him," she said, but there was not much hope in her voice.

When Mark reached the Ariosto it was past midnight, and there were only a few bored-looking tourists in the lobby. The desk clerk gave him his key and said, "You have a message from a Mrs. Amanda Warren. She has telephoned several times."

"Yes, what is it?" Mark said quickly.

"She wishes you to ring her in the morning. She is stopping at the Wilson."

"And that was all?"

"Yes, sir."

Mark slept badly that night. He got up at six, lit a cigarette, and walked to the windows. The city was still dark, but a thin rosy light was spreading on the horizon. There was no point in going back to bed. He called room service, told them to send up his breakfast, and then went into the bathroom, shaved, and took a long shower. By then it was a quarter past seven.

Mark ate his breakfast standing, and dressed quickly. Then he phoned Johnny's apartment and talked to Maria. She sounded as if she hadn't slept at all; her voice was sulky and irritable. He hadn't come home, she said.

He didn't want to get involved in her troubles, but he knew he'd help, if possible.

Why hadn't he told her to use Johnny's philosophy? Be cynical, remember that emotions are just a bourgeois trap. But that wouldn't help, of course. Their system only applied to other people's troubles.

Now it was seven-thirty. He picked up the phone and asked for the Wilson. When Amanda answered, he said, "This is Mark Rayburn. I got your message last night."

"Yes, I wanted to talk to you." Her voice was clear and friendly. "When are you leaving Rome?"

"Five-thirty this afternoon."

"Any plans for today?"

"No, nothing."

"Well, would you like to show me the city, or take me to lunch or something?" She laughed good-humouredly. "I'm not suggesting this as a consolation prize. But I'd like to make up for yesterday. O.K.?"

"Why, sure. I'll meet you at your hotel. How about nine o'clock?"

"Let's see. Make it half past. That all right?"

"Fine. I'll see you then."

Mark put the phone down. He was frowning slightly. This was a pleasant development, but his hard common sense told him there was something wrong with it.

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[NCC 856]

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She was wearing a grey flannel suit, with a tiny bunch of violets, and carried a soft tweed topcoat over her arm.

They shook hands, smiling; her manner was friendly and relaxed. " I'm glad you didn't decide to sulk," she said. " I feel lucky to have an American guide to take me around Rome."

It would be light and impersonal today, he realized. Yesterday was done with and forgotten. " Well, what do you want to see? " he said, as they moved out of the busy lobby into the sunlight.

" Oh, just everything," she said.

They spent a pleasant morning, since both of them took pains to keep their conversation casual. He took her to St. Peter's, and they walked around the immense piazza, studying the façade of the church, and the fall of sunlight on its golden dome. Mark led her through the church and out of a side door of the transept. They walked around to the Vatican museum, spent half an hour inside and then returned to the bright shimmer of the sunlight.

It was then that Mark noticed for the first time the squat, ungainly man with the camera slung about his neck. He stood on the opposite side of the street, studying a light meter, an ugly, broad-faced man with jocular, good-humoured eyes. He wore a black beret on his large, square head, baggy grey flannel trousers, and a tweed jacket with leather elbow patches. There was something comical in his absorption with the light meter, and the occasional appraising glances he cast at the wall of the museum. He seemed ridiculous in an innocent fashion, like an intelligent bear concentrating on a problem hopelessly beyond his capacities.

Mark forgot him as they climbed into a waiting cab. They spent an hour driving through the golden web of the city's streets, admiring the endless fountains with their heroic sculptures, and the beige-pink tones of the old walls and buildings. He showed her the things he liked best in Rome; the Piazza Navona with its Bernini fountains, the exquisite museum in the Villa Borghese, and the vast, intricate Fontana di Trevi where they made wishes, as was customary, buying coins from grinning little boys to throw into the splashing, sun-sparkled water.

Their conversation was bright and empty. At one point she said, " I'll have to remember all these places so I can come back and see them again. Once isn't enough."

He looked at her then and said, " How long are you going to be here? "

" I haven't decided yet," she said.

Half an hour later, they were standing under the umbrella pines, high on the Janiculum, looking out over the sweep of the city, which was glowing now in fragile pastel colours. She turned to him, smiling. " Something about Rome affects me queerly. It's the frightening sense of timelessness, I think," she said. " My life accidentally fell into narrow divisions of time, you see. School, travel, marriage—they were each wrapped up in neat little parcels of time."

" Is your marriage all washed up? " he said.

"My husband is dead. He was killed in a car accident five years ago."

"I'm sorry."

"You needn't be." She shrugged irritably. "I didn't mean to trail out my ancient misfortunes." She turned and put her elbows on the iron railing. "My husband was a newspaperman, and a very fine one when he was sober. He was thirteen years older than I, and he'd had a lot of tough breaks. His family, the war, and so forth. He couldn't get straightened out, which was my fault, I suppose."

"Why do you say that?" he said, glancing at her sharply. "You tried. What else can anyone do?"

She looked up at him and he was surprised at the anger in her face. "I might have known you'd say that, after the way you barged into—" She didn't complete the sentence, but turned and looked out again at the city.

He stared at the clean pale line of her profile, fighting down his own anger. "After the way I barged into things yesterday," he said. "Is that what you were going to say?"

"Yes, but it doesn't make any difference. Let's go, shall we?"

"I thought you needed help."

"I don't need help," she said, spacing the words deliberately, in a tightly controlled voice. She pounded her gloved fist on the iron railing. "There are people who can't be helped, for one reason or another. It cost me a lot to learn that.

"I didn't mean to start all this today, believe me. I'm sorry. What I wanted to say was that strong people—and you may be one, for all I know—barge into situations without thinking of consequences. Things are easy for them. They don't have normal worries and fears. And usually they only add to the mess. It's wiser to let people alone."

Now his anger was replaced with exasperation. "You make it complicated," he said.

"Well, life is complicated. For me, anyway. Please, let's go. I don't know how we got into this thing."

"All right."

"Do you feel like lunch?"

"Yes, thanks."

They crossed the sun-splashed park to the cab rank in silence.

As he opened the door for her, Mark noticed a familiar figure standing at the railing that bounded the park. It was the camera enthusiast he had seen at the Vatican, the man in the black beret and tweed jacket. Now he was peering into the range-finder of his camera, a comically hopeful frown on his big, square face. Mark watched him, as Amanda climbed quickly into the cab.

"You aren't going to be gloomy, are you?" she said, as their cab moved off. "It's my fault if you are, of course." She smiled at him, but it was a mechanical effort.

"No, of course not," he took out his cigarettes.

As he held a light for her he glanced out of the rear window, and

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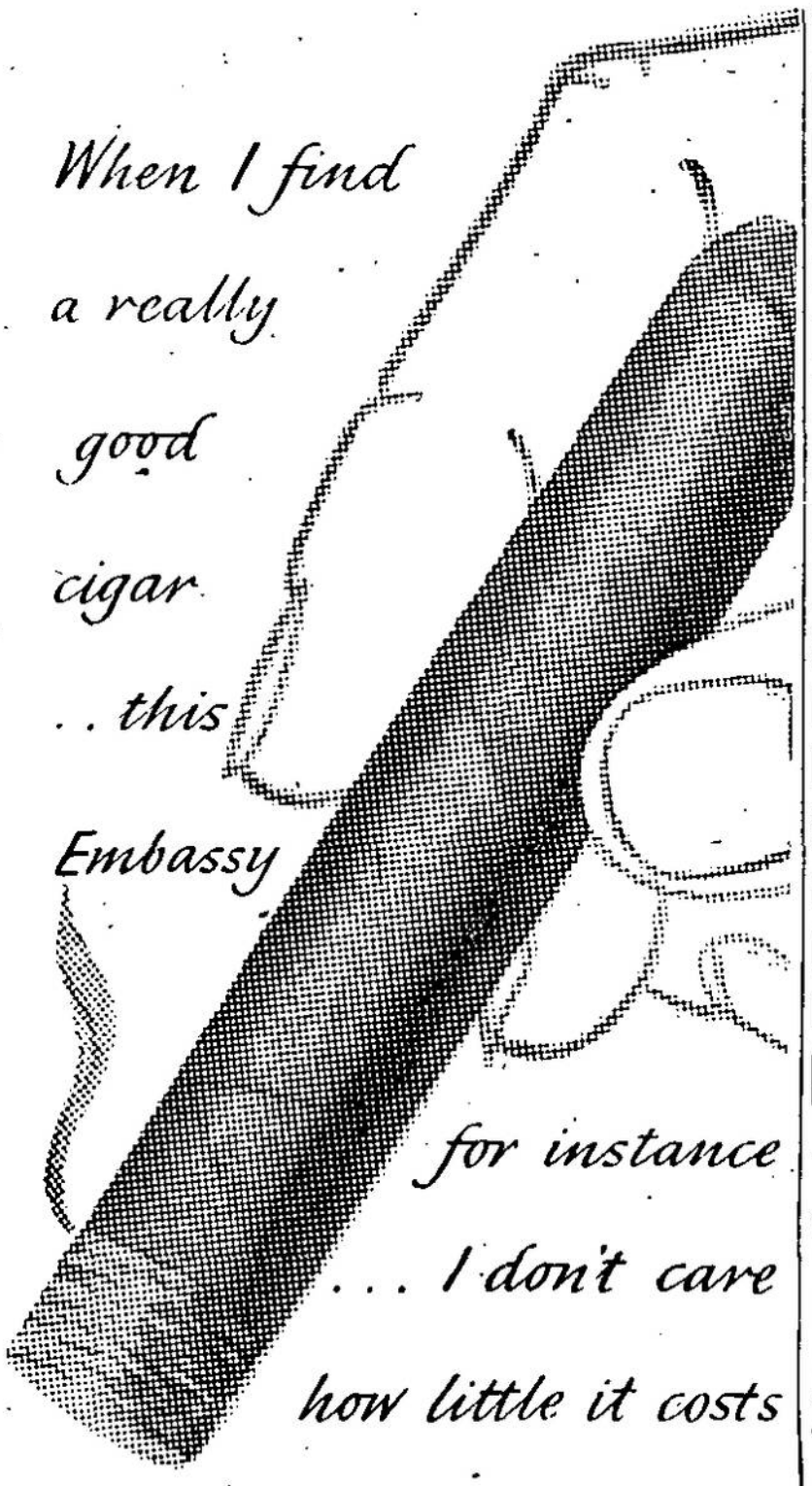

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saw the bulky man with the camera moving rapidly towards the line of cabs. He spoke to the driver, pointed after Mark's cab, and then hopped in, moving with the speed of a well-trained circus bear.

They lunched at Alfredo's in Trastevere. Mark ordered elaborately and painstakingly; he wasn't hungry and neither was she, he guessed, but the business of wines and food was a safe topic of conversation. They had fettuccine with cheese and a bottle of Frascati, then veal Marsala. It was a waste of excellent food; they talked about it appreciatively, but ate very little.

When they came out again, rain was beginning to fall, slowly, heavily, changing the light golden colour of the buildings to a cheerless brown. They stood under the awning of the restaurant looking out over a small piazza. Romans hurried past them with their umbrellas shining blackly. Across the street a chestnut vendor was covering his glowing brazier with a tent-like oilskin slicker.

Glancing to his left Mark saw, with no surprise, the big ungainly man in the tweed jacket and black beret. He was standing on the pavement about thirty yards from them, staring intently into a shop window, apparently oblivious of the rain.

" Have you noticed that we're being followed? " he said.

" What do you mean? " she said, but her eyes slid past him to the man in the tweed jacket.

" That's right, the camera bug. Is he a friend of yours? "

" It's past three o'clock," she said, after a little pause. " We'd better go."

" I'm in no hurry."

" Your flight's at [illegible]."

" It's good of you to remember it," he said drily. " Can I drop you at the Wilson? "

" Yes, please."

They took a cab through the wet streets and she sat with her face turned away from him, staring out at the false twilight gloom.

Mark said, " You saw me today to convince me that everything was all right, I suppose. Wasn't that it? "

She didn't answer, and he said, " You were very bright and cheerful, a happy, sightseeing tourist, with nothing on her mind but the wonders of Rome. I was supposed to go off thinking you couldn't possibly be in any trouble. Right? "

She turned to him then and he saw the tears in her eyes.

" You won't keep out of it," she said, in a weary, even voice. " All right then, I'll tell you about it . . ."

★ ***The lovely Amanda is a pawn in the murderous game of chess that is being played out against the sun-chequered streets of Rome. In the Second Part of "Margin of Terror," Mark attempts dangerous and intriguing moves—in next month's Argosy on sale August 10.***

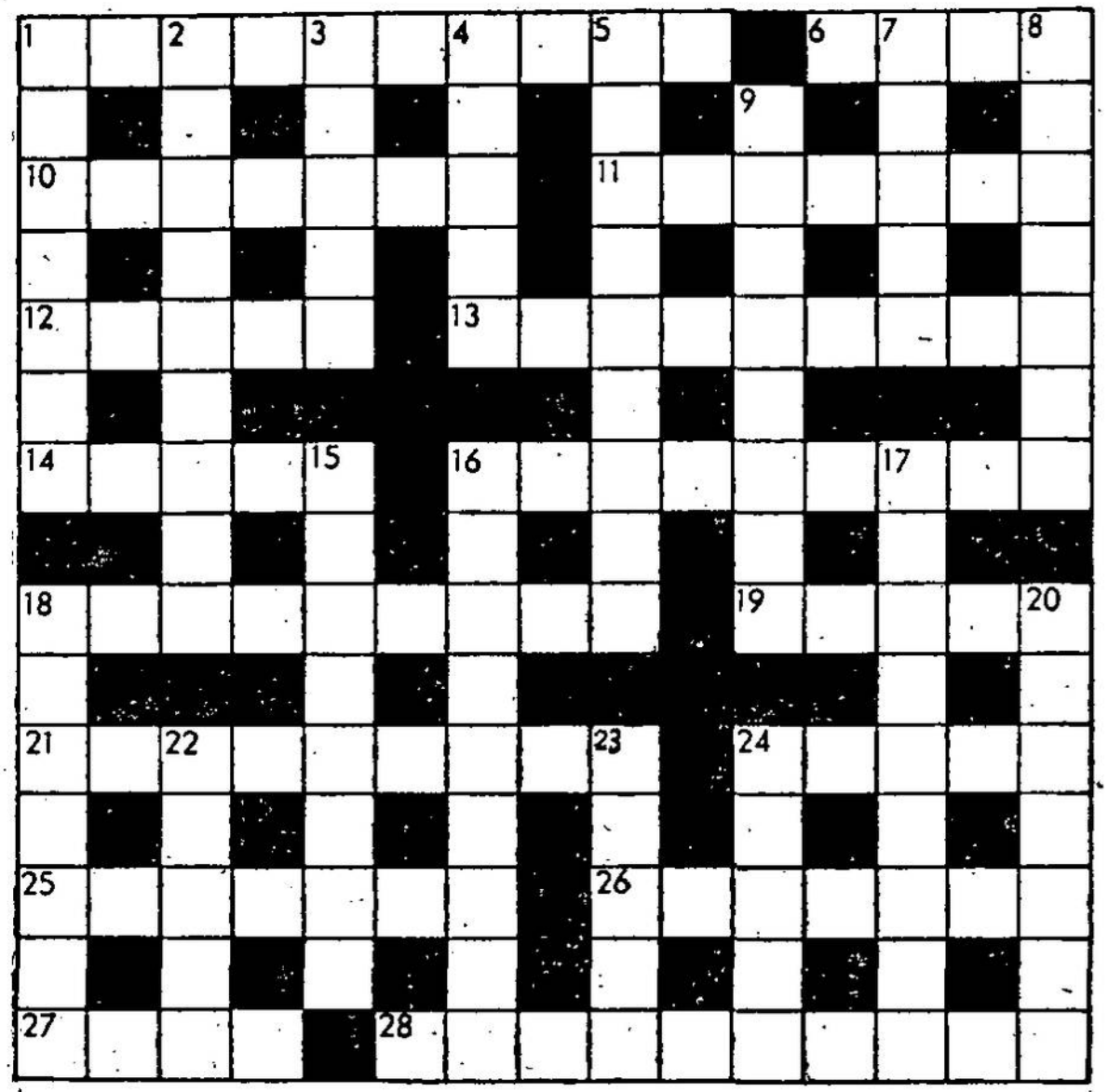
PRIZE CROSS WORD

No. 15

★

Rules of Entry on Page 109

★



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CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 Did Tommy Atkins think that this was the French for comfortable quarters? (6-4).

6 Grand way to shut a door! (4).

10 A thinking together is entertaining (7).

11 People want him to win —but not the bride (4, 3).

12 A page disconcerted: open-mouthed, in fact (5).

13 Is "bright Apollo's hair" ever concealed by this? (3-6).

14 This French town sounds feline (5).

16 Mr. Dangle's function was to do this, according to the title of Sheridan's play (9).

18 The girl on horseback is having a pleasure trip (3-6).

19 "—— loathed Melancholy!" (Milton) (5).

21 It may be royal or up to knavish tricks (5, 4).

24 Bernhardt and Siddons had this in common (5).

25 Definite or indefinite, it's a useful item (7).

26 Strangely enough, they're not the opposite of downs (7).

27 The knight is going east, Your Highness (4).

28 This mild oath proclaims the speaker's virtue (2, 8).

Down

1 The District Attorney gets into a fight and becomes a tool (7).

2 Praise a Conservative—or just praising (9).

3 It sounds as if the wanderer used to be insular (5).

4 Five hundred and a backward sage make up this French painter (5).

5 Rigid, yet straightening out (9).

7 This fruit can be mixed to make another (5).

8 Boy! A driving-off place. No, it's a sea-creature (7).

9 Surprise—rather like Aston (8).

15 A confused Asiatic century is painful (8).

16 Petty trickery begins with smartness (9).

17 This Bunyan character was naturally blissful (9).

18 When it's laughing this animal is a bird (7).

20 Site of Diana's temple and of a Shakespearian comedy (7).

22 A complete way to express yourself (5).

23 The Peninsular river has its own smell (5).

24 Thus cover a three-dimensional figure (5).

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